

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #162, March 16 – April 5, 2011
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

THE AGE OF REVOLUTION & COUNTER-REVOLUTION

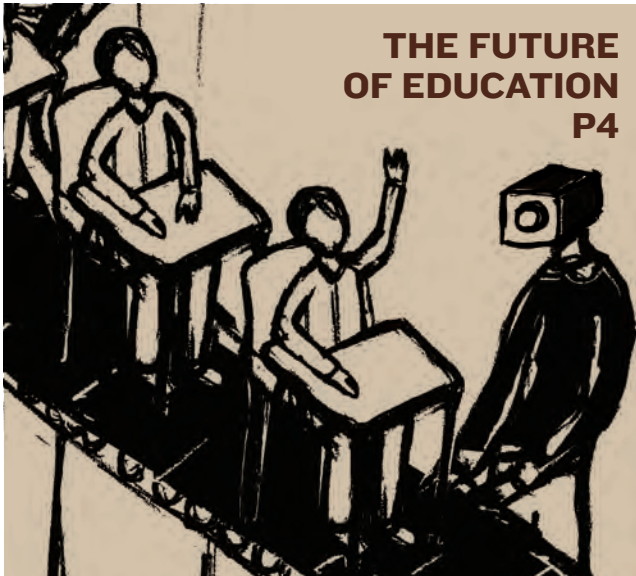


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INDYPENDENT.ORG



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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 16 times a year on Wednesdays for our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and with *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

MAR—APR

SAT MARCH 19

11:15 am • Free

PARTY: PURIM EXTRAVANGAZA.

Join Jews for Racial and Economic Justice for its 10th annual queer and radical celebration of the Jewish Carnival Holiday. Music will be provided by the Rude Mechanical Orchestra. St. Cecilia's Parish, 2 N Henry St, Brooklyn 212-647-8966 • jfrej.org

TUE MARCH 22

7:00 pm • \$5-\$10

DISCUSSION: CHRIS HEDGES' *DEATH OF THE LIBERAL CLASS*. Dr. Joseph Chuman will interview Chris Hedges about his new book. Hedges examines America's fallen liberal institutions and tells of his own experiences, especially of his role as a journalist for *The New York Times*. New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W 64th St 212-874-5210 • nysec.org

WED MARCH 23

7:30 pm • \$6/\$10/\$15

SCREENING: *CROSSING THE AMERICAN CRISES*. On Sept. 25, 2008, America suffered its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Two filmmakers, Michael Fox and Silvia Leindecker, set out to capture its effects on working people across 40 different states. Discussion with Fox and Leindecker to follow. Brecht Forum, 451 West St 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

7-9 pm • Free

TALK: REPORTING ON REVOLUTIONS: WHAT'S NEXT IN THE ARAB WORLD. Come hear first-hand accounts and original analysis on the Arab revolts from Democracy Now!'s Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Al Jazeera English correspondent Ayman Moheldin. 304 Barnard Hall, 3009 Broadway turath@columbia.edu

THU MARCH 24

5-7 pm • Free

RALLY: DAY OF RAGE AGAINST THE CUTS. Join a coalition of organizations as they call for students, labor leaders and concerned community members to bring the spirit of Cairo and Wisconsin to New York City. A rally will be held at City Hall followed

by a march to Wall Street to protest ongoing austerity measures. City Hall, 249 Broadway march4ny@gmail.com

FRI MARCH 25

7-9 pm • Free

MEMORIAL: 100 YEARS AFTER: THE TRIANGLE FIRE REMEMBERED AND RETHOUGHT. In tribute to the 146 garment workers who lost their lives in the fire, Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition will host a night of music, poetry, storytelling and art at the Great Hall in Cooper Union where the first Triangle Fire memorial march was held 100 years ago. Cooper Union, 7 E 7th St 212-353-4195 cooper.edu

SAT MARCH 26

8:45 am-8:00 pm •

\$8.76-\$125

CONFERENCE: WHOSE SCHOOLS? OUR SCHOOLS! The New York Collective of Radical Educators invites students, teachers, activists and community members to participate in their annual conference. The daylong event will focus on building ties between educators, communities and social justice movements followed by an afterparty. Julia Richman Education Complex, 317 E 167th St 212-570-5284 • nycore.org

SAT MARCH 26

4:30 pm • Free

SCREENING: YOUTH VOICES AGAINST CENSORSHIP. Join the National Coalition Against Censorship, Reel Works and Global Action Project for an afternoon of youth films, fun prizes and great performances. Meet the winners of the NCAC's 7th Annual film contest and learn about the power of youth media. New York Film Academy Screening



ARTHUR LAWRENCE BAYANO ALCOFF

FEBRUARY 5, 2011 6:37 AM • 6 LBS 12 OZ • 20 INCHES

Anna Gold & Sam Alcott

Room, 100 E 17th St

212-807-6222 • media@ncac.org

SAT APRIL 2

6:30-10 pm • Free

PANEL DISCUSSION: WHOSE PRESS? OUR PRESS! The Freedom Socialist Newspaper will kick off its annual fundraiser with a dinner and panel program about the importance of independent media for building social movements. Panelists include Steve Strauss of the *Freedom Socialist* and *Indypendent* editor Elizabeth Henderson. Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St 212-222-0633 • socialism.com

SAT APRIL 9

12-3 pm • Free

PROTEST: RALLY AGAINST THE WARS AT HOME AND ABROAD. Join the United National Antiwar Committee and hundreds of activists in a national day of action to bring the troops home, end U.S. military intervention and fix economic injustice at home. Union Square 518-227-6947 nationalpeaceconference.org

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR WEEKLY ONLINE CALENDAR VIA EMAIL AT INDYPENDENT.ORG

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDYPENDENT?

BELOW 14TH ST.

WBAI - 99.5FM
120 Wall St., 10th floor

Bluestockings
172 Allen St.

Housing Works
126 Crosby St.

Hudson Park
Branch Library
66 Leroy St.

Mercer St. Books
206 Mercer St.

Whole Earth Bakery
130 St. Marks Place

Brecht Forum
451 West St.

4th Street Food Co-op
58 E. 4th St.

Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.

DC 37 Headquarters
125 Barclay St.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

New York Public Library
Epiphany Branch
228 E. 23rd St.

Chelsea Square
Restaurant
23rd St. & 9th Ave

Manhattan
Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.

New York Public Library
Muhlenberg Branch
209 W. 23rd St.

St. Agnes Branch Library
444 Amsterdam Ave.
(btwn 81st and 82nd)

ABOVE 96TH ST.

New York Public Library
George Bruce Branch
518 W. 125th St.

Book Culture
526 W. 112th St.

New York Public Library
Harlem Branch
9 W. 124th St.

New York Public Library
Hamilton Grange Branch
503 W. 145th St.

Uptown Sister's Books
156 St. & Amsterdam

Bloomingdale
Branch Library
150 W. 100th St.

BROOKLYN
Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.

BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.

Tillie's of Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.

Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.

Video Gallery
310 Seventh Ave.

Ozzie's Coffee Shop
249 5th Ave. &
57 Seventh Ave.

Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.

Pillow Café
505 Myrtle Ave.

Sisters Community
Hardware
900 Fulton St.

Brooklyn Public Library
Pacific Street Branch
25 Fourth Ave.

K-Dog & Dune Buggy
43 Lincoln Rd.

Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.

Blackbird Café
197 Bedford Ave.

'sNice Café
315 Fifth Ave.

Purity Diner
43 Underhill Ave.

Brooklyn
Public Library
Bedford Branch
496 Franklin St.

BRONX

Brook Park
141st St. & Brook Ave.

Mi Casa Cafe
18 Bedford Park Blvd E.

New York Public Library
High Bridge Branch
78 W. 168th St.

New York Public Library
Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.

STATEN ISLAND

St. George Library
5 Central Ave.

Port Richmond
Branch Library
75 Bennett St.

Dot Com Cafe
36 Bay St.

Everything Goes
Book Café
208 Bay St.

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

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Venezuela Keeps the Heat on in the Bronx

By JOHN McDONALD

Leonora Laboy has received a credit on her rent in the Mount Hope section of the Bronx for the last two years through help from an unlikely source — the Venezuelan government.

Mount Hope Housing Company, Inc., the community development organization that manages the housing complex where Laboy lives, has participated in Citgo Oil's heating oil subsidy program for the past six years, including 2010. This year, 290 of Mount Hope's almost 400 residents benefited from the program, which grants recipients an annual rent credit.

"It definitely makes a difference," said Laboy, a widow with five children.

Every year Citizens Energy, a Boston based company that uses revenues from commercial enterprises to channel millions of dollars into charitable programs in the U.S. and abroad, asks for aid from major oil producers — including Chevron, ExxonMobil and BP — to alleviate the burden of high heating costs for low income, elderly and Native American populations in the United States. Citgo, which is a subsidiary of the state-owned Petr leos de Venezuela, is the only company that agrees to help.

According to a Citgo official, the Heating Oil Program assisted 40,089 households in New York City in 2010, including 9,735 single-family homes and 30,354 apartments.

The subsidy works as a lump-sum annual credit based on a donation from Citgo that is applied as a rent credit. The amount is divided equally among the tenants and can be applied to a resident's rent bill throughout the year. The credit varies depending on the year and oil donation from Citgo, says Mount Hope property manager Roslyn Gaspard.

Ivelisse Arroyo, who received a rent credit of \$176 this year, has lived at Mount Hope for the past 10 years and has seen what a difference the subsidy can make. She says the heat and hot water are much more reliable than before and jokes that her son can no longer avoid taking baths, as he did as a small child, by claiming that there is no hot water.

Brian O'Connor, a vice president at Citizens Energy, says the company has reached over 500,000 people in 23 states with more than \$350 million in aid over six years. According to Citgo, the program also benefits, "more than 250 tribal communities and 234 homeless shelters across 25 states and the District of Columbia."

Recent proposals by President Obama to cut federal funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program in half will likely affect millions of low-income Americans in cold climates. O'Connor says these cuts will not directly affect resources for Citizens Energy but have created a large increase in demand for the program. These cuts could make the Citgo/Citizens Energy program all the more important and could possibly put indirect pressure on its efforts by increasing the pool

of those without access to heating subsidies, leaving some out in the cold. The Citgo program has also been in jeopardy in recent years because of the slumping profits of Petr leos de Venezuela due to a decrease in oil prices worldwide.

For now, Bronx residents hope to continue to benefit from the subsidy. Arroyo, who works as a receptionist at Mount Hope housing, says the program eases different aspects

of daily life at the complex. Better heating and hot water result in fewer colds and the rebate that she describes as "surprising and awesome" makes paying bills and putting food on the table easier.

To apply for the heating fuel assistance program call 1-877-JOE-4-OIL.



PHOTO: SOPHIE FORBES

TURNING IT UP: Roslyn Gaspard, the property manager for Mount Hope Housing Corporation in Bronx helps tenants receive a much-needed oil subsidy.

INDY WINS AT IPPIES

SPECIAL BACK TO SCHOOL ISSUE

THE INDEPENDENT

Issue #111, September 8 - 20, 2010
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

WHY OUR
SCHOOLS
ARE BROKEN
—and how to fix them

Test Prep
Madness, p4
Stanley Aronowitz
on Education, p14
Parent Voices, p8



The U.S. Boat to Gaza: The Anatomy of a Lie
will join the next Freedom Flotilla to break the
blockade and carry human rights activists to the
Shores of Gaza. Your donations will help purchase
food and medical supplies for the flotilla.

DONATE
ustogaza.org

**Help
Launch
a U.S. Boat
to Gaza**

The Independent won awards for excellence in photography and design at the March 10 "Ippies" Awards banquet sponsored by the New York Community Media Alliance (NYCMA). Joseph Huff-Hannon won 1st place in the "Best Photo" category for "The Ballad of Billy Lee: The Untold Story of An American 'Desaparecido' in Argentina;" Anna Gold and Ryan Dunsmaur won 2nd place in "Best Overall Design," for *The Independent's* Sept. 8 issue on education; and Amelia H. Krales won 2nd place in the "Best Photo Essay," category for her profile of Elda Malpera, titled "Living Positively with HIV."

An Antiwar Movement Rises Again

By ELIZABETH HENDERSON

With next September marking the 10th anniversary of the Afghanistan War, a new antiwar group, the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), is hoping to reinvigorate the peace movement by appealing to popular sentiment against multiple U.S. wars as well as to opposition to budget cuts and corporate bailouts at home.

"I think that UNAC is helping to rebuild the antiwar movement after a serious lull, which was the result of the presidential election. A lot of people thought that Barack Obama would end the wars, redistribute wealth, that there would be real change — but there wasn't," said Ashley Smith, a member of the UNAC steering committee who also belongs to the International Socialist Organization.

The group is currently focused on building connections among a wide variety of groups along with mobilizing people to turn out for two major rallies on April 9 and 10, in New York City and San Francisco, respectively. More than 500 organizations are sponsoring the demonstrations, ranging from Iraq Veterans Against the War and the National Green Party to 1199 SEIU and Students for a Democratic Society.

While the coalition, which was formed at a national antiwar conference in Albany, N.Y., last July, is making a targeted effort to build ties with labor, student, Muslim and South Asian community groups, Smith says that UNAC is reaching out to "every con-

stituency that we can possibly think of."

Organizers say their strategy is to politically link the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere to state budget cuts and layoffs on the domestic front. They say one hopeful sign is how recent attacks on public workers in Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin have galvanized mass protests.

Joe Lombardo, another member of the UNAC steering committee, equates Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's gutting of collective bargaining rights to women losing the right to vote.

"People will not give those kinds of rights back. We have to fight against these attacks that we're all feeling," said Lombardo, who also belongs to Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace.

In addition to the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, UNAC is also working on campaigns against FBI repression of antiwar activists and the scapegoating of Arabs and Muslims. Other efforts include advocating for the release of Bradley Manning and supporting the U.S. Boat to Gaza.

Leading up to the April rallies UNAC is organizing teach-ins across the country to mark the eighth anniversary of the Iraq War on March 19.

With many activists looking

to recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa and demonstrations in Wisconsin as a precursor of a stronger left, Smith says UNAC plans be a part of this "new resistance to imperialism."

"UNAC hopes to play an important role in growing the antiwar movement in a meaningful way. U.S. imperialism isn't going to give up its control of the planet without a fight," Smith said.



JESSICA PATRICK

The Knowledge Factory

BY STANLEY ARONOWITZ

After shellacking a confused and fragmented Democratic Party last fall, the Right interpreted its victory as a mandate to squash the remaining resistance to the program of privatizing and cutting every itch and scratch of public services.

Schooling is the main target for a simple reason: In the United States public schools account for 50 percent of the state and local budgets and are subject to state and local laws. The federal government tries to influence education policies, but, apart from its support of charter schools (a form of privatization), its only leverage is a few billion dollars in aid, which does not go very far when spread around school systems in 50 states.

In 2010 the GOP won 23 statehouses, including Democratic strongholds such as Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. New Jersey fell into Republican hands in 2009. Of the major states, only New York and California resisted the tidal wave of Republican victories, although in New York the Senate passed to Republican rule. But Democratic governors — including New York's Andrew Cuomo and California's Jerry Brown — are in the thrall of large business interests as well and are attacking public employees' wages, pensions and health benefits to solve severe budget shortfalls.

SPREAD THE WEALTH

Completely off the table is any proposal to raises taxes on the rich. In New York State there are some calls for restoring the virtually extinct stock transfer tax — still on the books — which would levy a tax of one dollar for every thousand dollars of stock traded in the three major exchanges. Studies estimate that if fully implemented the tax would raise \$12 billion and all but erase the state's deficit and leave a few billion dollars to boost spending on education, healthcare and the abysmally low state employee wages and benefits. (Such a tax could also curtail the "hyper-trading" that has become a new means for powerful institutional traders to profit from manipulating the markets.) The Right's strategy of abrogating decades of collective bargaining has been thrown into bold relief with GOP governors targeting public employee unions in Indiana, Idaho, Ohio and Wisconsin, among other states. Despite heroic resistance in Wisconsin and the blinding light of national publicity, Gov. Scott Walker succeeded in ramming through a bill that would not only strip public workers of nearly all bargaining rights, but also limit wage increases to the inflation rate — which has been deliberately suppressed for decades because government calculations on inflation exclude many everyday commodities.

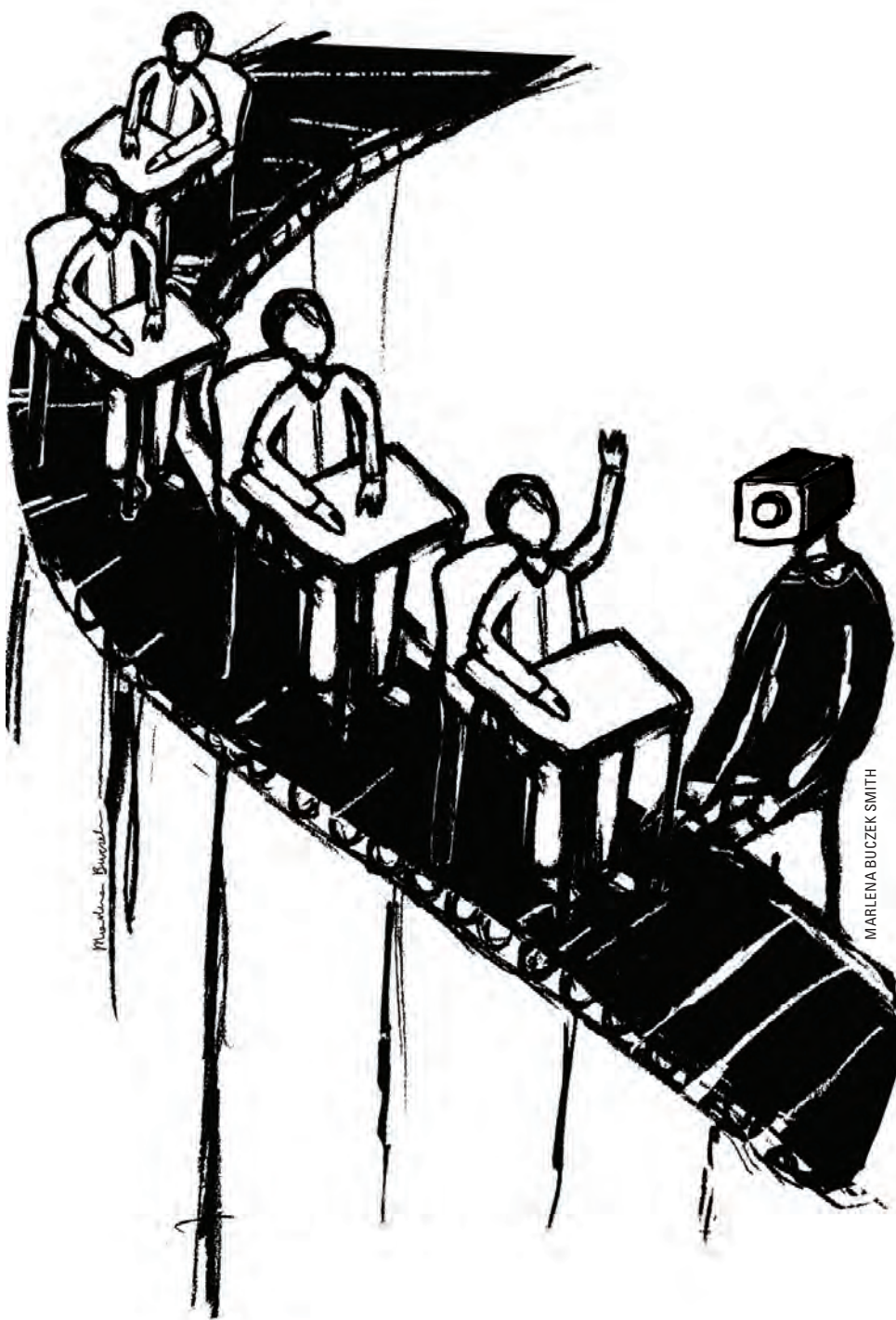
The fallout has just begun. A period of continual confrontation between public employees and rightist state legislatures seems likely. It's unclear, however, if national and local unions are up to the challenge, which demands they reverse their ingrained habits of compla-

cency and complicity. Early indications are that they might, but only to advance the position of the Democratic Party. Wisconsin union leaders are sponsoring recall elections of state legislators and the governor and might extend this plan to other states. Still in question is whether unions will respond to the flagrant attacks on their living standards and power by employing workers' real power: the ability to withdraw their labor. This includes everything from a general strike to rolling job actions in schools, health facilities and other public agencies. This eventuality is far from certain. Labor has long ceased being a movement and has chosen, instead, to play the electoral game. Opting for the ritual of top-down electoral politics means the momentum produced by the monumental Madison, Wis., demonstrations may be defused.

MISEDCATION

Thus far the attack on public education has focused on K-12. Almost unnoticed is a parallel assault on public higher education, particularly cuts in funding to state universities and community colleges. Whereas tenure track positions used to be the norm, guaranteeing academic freedom and a degree of economic security, today only about 28 percent of faculty is tenure track. The rest are relegated to part-time and temporary employment, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

This has been accompanied by ballooning class sizes in required and introductory courses. A lecture hall course with 300 students promotes rote learning and minimizes student-teacher interaction, which means many students do not graduate. In fact, since the 1980s, graduation rates in almost all state colleges and universities have plummeted, and the rate of dropouts is most severe in two-year community colleges.



right to raise tuition fees without approval of state officials or legislators. I teach at the City University of New York, the largest system of urban higher education in the country. Tuition there makes up almost 50 percent of its operating budget. If the university administration succeeds in implementing annual tuition increases, student fees will account for more than 60 percent of operating costs in less than a decade.

PAY TO LEARN

Tuition rises, of course, warp the character of higher learning. With student aid on the chopping block, many lower-income families and students find they can no longer afford college, so the class composition of student bodies is shifting. The promise of open admissions to community colleges (but not to four-year schools) is still formally observed, but in practice economic barriers prevent a substantial number of students from enrolling.

College administrations have undertaken major pedagogic innovations to cut costs as well. The most important

is "distance learning." Distance learning takes place by means of computer communication, facilitated by specially designed programs such as Blackboard, which makes feedback easier. From the teacher's perspective, the work is labor intensive. Students may contact their mentors any time during the night and day. Class assignments are usually delivered en masse, but mentorship is typically individual. Moreover, important benefits of face-to-face encounters are lost: visual means of evaluating whether or not students are grasping ideas; the exchange of ideas not only between teacher and student, but among students as well; and the continuation of conversations in cafeterias, hallways, bars and coffee shops.

At a time when funding crises are supposedly permanent, college administrators have found their most effective tool is securing the

Administrations are excited about distance learning for several reasons. Rising college enrollments mean space has become scarce. Computer-mediated classes require no rooms, electric lights or staff to maintain the space. Some students, as well, like the fact that they do not have to spend hours commuting to class. Moreover, instruction need not interfere with students' work schedules. But at the top of the lists of benefits for the institution is saving money in a time of fiscal austerity.

Needless to say, many instructors are opposed to distance learning, and not just because of the heavier workload. They worry about who owns their labor. If a faculty member develops a new course, writes a syllabus, produces a weekly course outline and delivers a series of video or audio lectures to an online class, will s/he retain the copyright or will the institution, strapped for income, claim ownership? From the administration's point of view, owning the materials permits it to cut down on the costs of pedagogy. The lectures can be reproduced endlessly and the instructor need not be highly skilled; her main function could be to counsel students.

NO MORE TEACHERS

This form of distance learning could be the first step in the teacher-less classroom. Graduate students and other less-credentialed instructors cost far less than tenured professors. The professor is no longer a teacher in the traditional sense. She has become a course planner, developer and model builder. She may be paid extra for her work, but the returns to the institution are far greater. The institution, which has already cut tenured faculty, can sharply reduce their number even further. Eventually, some argue, the college buildings may become mainly conference and entertainment centers, sites of graduate study that still require seminar space and administrative offices. But, at state schools, the virtual classroom would ultimately define public higher education. Florida is moving rapidly toward this future with its distance learning permeating even public high schools in Miami-Dade County

The distance learning trend also favors private colleges and universities because an actual classroom becomes a prized selling point. While some do offer distance courses, particularly for "continuing education," parents who shell out one or two hundred thousand dollars in tuition and room and board costs over four years demand that their children have direct access to "real" professors. That some private universities employ legions of graduate students and part-time faculty for introductory courses can be ignored if students are taught in actual classrooms for the upper-level, specialized education required for their majors.

With class sizes that are smaller than those of their public counterparts by half or more, private universities are widening the gap between the two systems of higher ed-

Programs at risk	Tax breaks for the wealthy
\$11.2 billion Early childhood programs	\$11.5 billion Per-year cost of recent tax cuts for millionaires' estates
\$8.9 billion Low-income housing programs	\$8.9 billion Cost of allowing mortgage interest deduction for vacation homes (est. 10-year cost)
\$7.6 billion Supplemental nutrition for poor families (WIC)	\$6.7 billion Cost of "estate planning" techniques used by wealthy to avoid taxes
\$4.6 billion Teacher training and afterschool programs	\$5.2 billion Cost of removing limit on itemized deductions for high-income taxpayers, FY 2011
\$4.1 billion Job training for unemployed and new workers	\$4.1 billion Cost of tax breaks for offshore operations of U.S. financial companies
\$2.5 billion Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) grants to poor families	\$2.5 billion Tax breaks for oil companies (write-offs for drilling and oil well costs, FY 2012)
\$2.5 billion Community health centers	\$4.9 billion Cost of extending alcohol fuel tax breaks
\$2.0 billion Homeless Assistance Grants	\$2.3 billion Tax loophole for managers of hedge funds and private equity funds (FY 2012)
\$420 million Legal services for the poor	\$312 million Cost of allowing companies to write off punitive damages (10 years)
\$317 million Title X Family Planning	\$303 million Cost of special tax breaks for the timber industry
\$44 billion All programs at risk combined	\$42 billion One-year cost of extending Bush tax cuts for top brackets (FY 2012)
<div>Center for American Progress</div> <div>www.americanprogress.org</div>	

ucation. Many accomplished high school graduates choose private schools, and the public universities and colleges are left to address the learning deficits produced in underfunded, overcrowded public schools.

What is at stake in the devolution of a public system that teaches more than 70 percent of the 15 million U.S. students in higher education? Already, the stated public policy of achieving education equality between blacks and whites has been severely damaged by the precipitous drop in the number of black male college graduates in the previous two decades.

The gap between private and public education, the perception that a high school diploma is less relevant to the job market and the privatization of public higher education are all serious problems, but we are faced with a bigger dilemma. Is the commitment to genuine education alive and well or are we destined for the rapid evolution of a university system into a knowledge factory where the credential means everything?

The stakes of real mass education are significant. For one, a highly educated workforce may be necessary for genuine economic improvement, although the apparently intractable rate of real unemployment that has sidelined one-sixth of the U.S. workforce raises serious questions whether an advanced capitalist economy can absorb all those willing to enter paid labor. (And as Paul Krugman just discovered 20 years after the fact, technological change rather than globalization has rendered nearly a fifth of the population's produc-

tive workers permanently redundant.)

What is indisputable is the desirability of an educated population to sustain a vibrant democracy and a culture that provides a key component of the good life. Critical education helps the citizen make significant decisions on questions of international, national and local politics. It develops the capacity that average people possess for active participation in the decisions that affect their life and the lives of their country and the planet. (I am leaving aside, for now, the questions of who qualifies as a citizen, and what is meant here by a vibrant democracy and by citizenship itself.)

IDEAL COMMUNITY

This type of democracy is not fulfilled by the act of voting, as can be seen by a U.S. electoral system that is largely a plebiscite on continuing the existing order. There are no active political forces contesting the rule of capital over the state as well as the economy. Should schooling at all levels, but particularly higher education, acknowledge its primary task to be assisting in the formation of a critical polity? In recent years, even the myth of critical thinking that once constituted the justification for higher education has gradually given way to the ideal that it is nothing more than higher training for the corporate capitalist order.

The second important stake in a critical program for higher education is encouraging the radical imagination. By "radical," I mean the capacity of the people to imagine the new, to be willing and able to take the risks needed to make change rather than accommodate to a sclerotic social order. And it means developing the critical faculty to distinguish between technologies that reinforce subordination and techniques that point to freedom. Distance learning isolates the learner from the interactions needed to stimulate the imagination. It presents itself as an opportunity but, when combined with the sharp reduction of experienced, devoted teachers and cooperative learning environments in which to explore self and the world, it leads to alienation.

The ultimate stake in the current regime of counterrevolutionary educational reform is the question of what kind of society we wish to create. Budget cuts in higher education or public services are not merely temporary. They foreshadow a mean season that recalls the squalor of the 18th century. That squalor was, and remains, combined with unimagined wealth that justifies itself by its sheer power and a series of myths.

Stanley Aronowitz is a distinguished professor at the CUNY Graduate Center and the author of more than 25 books, including Against Schooling: For an Education That Matters and The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning.

BRECHT FORUM

For social justice, equality and a new culture that puts human needs first.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BRECHT FORUM

WED MARCH 23 • 6-7:30 PM

CLASS: INTERMEDIATE SPANISH.

This 10-session class, taught by Jose Rosa, will help students develop everyday conversational skills while learning more complex grammatical forms. \$275

SAT MARCH 26 • 1:30-5:30 PM

CRITICAL THOUGHT SERIES: HISTORY OF MATERIALISM.

This 8-session course, taught by Michael Pelias, will explore the concept of materialism in philosophical discourse. Co-sponsored by the 15th Street Manifesto Group. Sliding scale: \$75-\$95

THU MARCH 31 • 7:30 PM

BOOK PARTY / FORUM: *THE BOWERY: A HISTORY OF GRIFT, GRAFT AND GRANDEUR*.

Join Eric Ferrara of the Lower East Side History Project; Rob Hollander, a long-time resident of Loisaia and a local community activist; and David Mulkins, from the Bowery Alliance of Neighbors as they discuss the Bowery's fascinating past. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

SUN APRIL 10 • 7 PM

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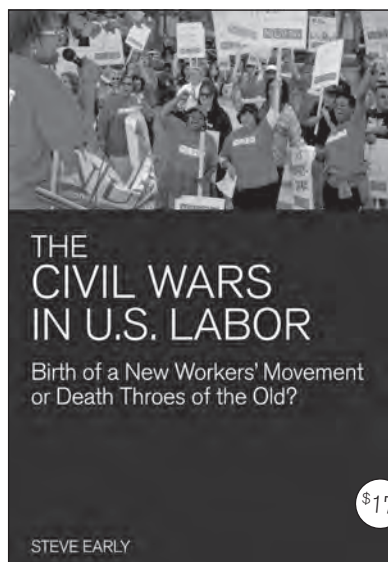
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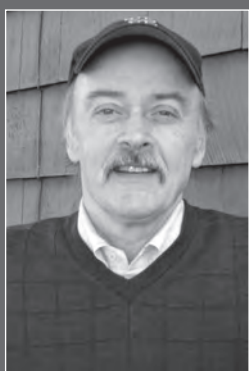
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UPRISING

The Wisconsin Idea A CENTURY OF RADICALISM

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

If there is one single reason why Wisconsin has become a national battleground in the war to roll back labor rights, it is history. Starting with Germans who immigrated to the Badger State after fleeing the crushed revolution of 1848 in Germany, Wisconsin is steeped in more than a century of popular movements that fought for women's equality, freedom of the press, grassroots democracy and socialism.

This history includes "Fightin' Bob" La Follette who was governor of the state from 1901 to 1906 and the founding of the nation's first public employees union in 1932. Robert Marion La Follette was a radical, anti-slavery Republican who championed the first system of worker's compensation, progressive taxation, the open primary, women's suffrage and the direct election of U.S. Senators. All this came to be known as "the Wisconsin Idea."

Less well known is that the city of Milwaukee had Socialist Party mayors and city councils from 1910 to 1960. European immigrants poured into Wisconsin in the late 19th century as Milwaukee was industrializing. The resulting concentration of wealth and monopolies in railroad rates, grain elevators and utilities spurred labor organizing. Deaths from industrial accidents and an 1896 boycott of a streetcar monopoly in Milwaukee awakened thousands to the value of organized resistance. Socialists ran explicitly against municipal corruption and bribery ("boodling").

Socialist policies helped reduce crime and disease and completely eliminated municipal debt by 1932. Because these elected officials fought against privatization of public utilities, they were often derided as "sewer socialists."

The party owed much of its effectiveness to the "Bundle Brigades," dedicated volunteers who engaged in public education house to house, outside factory gates and on street corners. On any chosen issue, they could distribute

750,000 leaflets in no less than 12 languages within 48 hours.

The first elected socialist mayor was a patternmaker by trade. Emil Seidel served from 1910 to 1912 and hired the future poet and Lincoln biographer, Carl Sandburg, to serve as his personal secretary.

Dan Hoan, voted in as Seidel's city attorney, took on the railroad monopoly and enforced contracts that required them to elevate or lower tracks for public safety. Hoan also persuaded the city to reject a 10-year contract with the electric company to furnish street lights, maintaining public ownership instead.

In 1916, the 35-year-old Hoan was elected mayor. In his inaugural address he said, "The workers of our city are its most valuable asset. It is necessary and desirable to apply our attention to such measures as will promote their well-being, safeguard their health and protect their rights." One of his first acts was to enact a municipal tax to cover a \$2 million shortfall in funding the fire and police pensions.

While Hoan supported U.S. entry into World War I, splitting with the Socialist Party, he tried to alleviate profiteering by selling surplus army food inexpensively: canned peas, peaches, beans, tomatoes and sardines. He created free toy libraries for children.

Serving as mayor until 1940, Hoan helped create Milwaukee's fine network of parks and protected shoreline with a "make work" system that employed 2,000 men during the Great Depression. Also in the 1930s, Milwaukee issued \$12 million in scrip, called baby bonds, to pay city workers and which were accepted by grocers and valid for municipal taxes.

One lasting investment was Milwaukee's public housing, another first in the nation. Begun in 1919, the program sought to eliminate "speculation in land values and of waste and private profit in home construction," and foster "the planning of streets, water, lighting and recreation spaces; and the collective ownership of homes by the workers."

Scott Walker should listen to what Dan Hoan said in 1932: "Universal cutting of wages is frequently advocated and resorted to as a remedy for depression, which leads to a reduction of consuming power and results in the decline of industry and the closing of factories. Then follows the demand for further cuts in wages. To follow this path is to dig our own grave. For example, thousands of small shopkeepers are hanging on by a mere thread; to cut their trade means to close them up and drive them to poor relief, which again raises taxes."

The Socialists also advocated a universal six-hour workday "to give immediate employment to those out of work, to diminish the demand for poor relief and stave off the increasing menace of innumerable municipal bankruptcies."

Perhaps the most famous Wisconsin Socialist was Victor Berger, who with Eugene Debs helped found the Socialist Party in 1901. Berger published a series of newspapers starting in the 1890s, culminating in *The Milwaukee Leader*, which denounced World War I as "a capitalist orgy of blood-letting."

Under a banner of "Starve the War and Feed America," Victor Berger was elected to multiple terms as a U.S. congressman. But Berger paid a price for his antiwar views. He was indicted and convicted of violating the Espionage Act because of his editorials. Even while staring at 20 years at Leavenworth, Berger was reelected in 1918.

Milwaukee's third Socialist Mayor, Frank Zeidler, served from 1948 to 1960. He presided over a period of rapid population growth and is remembered for his constructive relations with Milwaukee's Black community at a time when his adversary, police commissioner Harold Breier, brutalized civil rights demonstrators.

What changed? While Madison is a liberal island, Wisconsin is overwhelmingly white, so perhaps it was easier for the Tea Party to make inroads with its veiled racial appeals and scapegoating. Unemployment in Wisconsin is 9.6 percent, and the state lost 3,600 public service jobs in January before Walker's threatened layoffs. Local labor educator Frank Emspak points out that as wages have stagnated or even declined for many in Wisconsin, the promise of lower taxes were tempting.

But given the mass outpouring of dissent in Madison to the right-wing assault, Wisconsin is showing that its legacy of radical left politics has relevance far beyond the history books.



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

"FIGHTIN' BOB": Robert Marion La Follette, who served as governor from 1901 to 1906, was well known for championing progressive causes, including labor rights and women's suffrage.

A Plan for Fighting Back

BY MARK BRENNER AND
JANE SLAUGHTER

Bubbling up from the grassroots, the month of organizing and resistance in Wisconsin has shown us the labor movement's power and potential. From the creativity and self-organization on display as thousands occupied the statehouse to the countless acts of solidarity from places like Eau Claire and Two Rivers, this was truly a justice movement, fueled by much more than collective bargaining rights for teachers and firefighters.

The scale and stamina of the hundreds of thousands who sat down, marched, danced and even traded wedding vows as part of this outpouring of popular outrage has inspired activists around the globe.

That energy is the key to resisting Gov. Scott Walker's legislative coup. It's time to scale up, not step back. It won't be easy, but here are seven ideas for building on this unprecedented moment.

ONE-DAY STRIKE

The AFL-CIO has called for nationwide solidarity actions on April 4 — the day Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. A one-day Wisconsin general strike on that day would show employers and politicians everywhere the depth of the anger and labor's ability to organize. Knowing a student and worker general strike was coming in Wisconsin would inspire unionists in other states to make their own actions bigger and bolder.

With rallies throughout the state, not just in Madison, such a strike would celebrate the movement's power and unity, what it accomplished and plans to accomplish. It could mark the beginning of a new and deeper stage of the struggle, recognizing that power is not won overnight.

It would collectively flip the bird to Gov. Scott Walker and his billionaire backers and collectively and publicly pledge union members to the tasks ahead.

Days of action could build up to April 4. With protests continuing, every demonstrator could be asked to choose an activity for follow-up: gathering recall signatures, building a local community coalition to fight service cuts, attending a union training on the new tactics for building and using workplace power.

Walker's new law says he can fire any state worker who strikes. All 200,000? The defense against that is massive numbers out.

ORGANIZE AT WORK

Public employees are experiencing shell

shock. But even unions without contracts can have stewards, educational meetings and collective workplace actions. They can find ways to show the boss they're angry, from T-shirt days to pickets before the shift to work-to-rules if they dare. Noontime marches to other union workplaces could strengthen bonds.

They can ask supporters to keep up the pressure. In La Crosse, for example, parents organized to present each teacher with an apple labeled "We back you to the core."

The loss of dues check-off is a setback but not insurmountable. Jim Cavanaugh, president of Madison's South Central Federation of Labor, said, "Given the level of interest union members are suddenly showing in their unions, the unions will survive."

"Annual certification will be a pain in the ass," Cavanaugh said. "But losing dues check-off makes unions talk to their members. If they ask people to have dues taken out of their bank accounts, they are going to get a much higher percentage today than they would have two months ago."



THE PEOPLE ARE MOBILIZED: Now is the time to escalate the struggle for labor and a just economy.

In some other states, like Texas and North Carolina, unions without collective bargaining rights are already acting like unions despite the odds. As they learn how to do so, Wisconsin public employees are starting from a stronger place.

STAND ARM IN ARM

Walker's austerity program spares almost no one and has the potential to unite almost everyone. Unions should be approaching community groups not just at the level of executive directors but organically on the local level to fight everything Walker will do before he is recalled.

Concerned about losing music in the schools? Have the kids put on an impromptu concert at the school board meeting. Enjoy having potholes fixed? Organize a community meeting, advertised by a totaled car in the town square and a banner explaining how many more accidents will happen if Walker's cuts to local aid go through.

DON'T WAIT FOR PERMISSION

In every union, public and private, the lesson of the last month is that members don't have to wait for the go-ahead from above. On Feb. 15 it was one local—Madison teachers and other school workers—that kicked off a statewide strike.

In an early meeting in Madison, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka said, "The members are ahead of us on this one." Prove him right.

PUNISH THE POLITICIANS

Recall the politicians who tried to annihilate the unions. Elect pro-labor candidates to replace them. The 14 senators who fled the state to block Walker's plans are looking great now, for Democrats. But the attitude of many Democrats toward worker rights looks good only when compared to that of zealots like Walker.

If labor doesn't manage to reject career-politician Democrats as the candidates to replace the eight senators being targeted for recalls, and instead run worker candidates pledged to labor's platform, the result could

be a giant "why did we bother?"

SEIZE THE MOMENT NATIONALLY

Does anyone think that workers in Florida or Ohio are any less angry than the cheese heads? Union leaders who don't seize the moment to ramp up their contract campaigns and their organizing should have their heads examined.

SHOW US THE MONEY!

One of the biggest lies in Wisconsin's whole budget circus is that public workers have beggared public treasuries. If the state looks broke, it's because the money's in the wrong hands. The national unions should mount a mammoth education campaign to show concretely how taxing the corporations and the rich would solve budget woes. That's the first step to creating the political will.

Shine a spotlight into the deep pockets. Educate the public about the immense wealth in this economy. Start with the political contributors bankrolling the assault on Wisconsin's workers—the Koch Brothers, M&I Bank, Wal-Mart.

Line up the "shop-ins," lobby occupations, pickets, flash mobs, guerrilla theater. Divest the pension funds from criminal banks. Plaster the town in posters showing which corporate welfare kings got Scott Walker's gross giveaways.

The kindling's bone dry; now let's find some sparks.

Reprinted from Labor Notes.

THE CHURCH OF THE PEOPLE'S CAPITOL

BY REVEREND BILLY TALEN

The Madison rotunda is full of a spiritual presence in the thousands of shouting citizens. Unlike many of the collective incantations I've witnessed in recent years, there is that progressive anger mixed into the singing. At the root of the power of the right-wing apocalyptic Christianity is the collective ecstasy of singing and praying, repeating beliefs in unison. We have seen the results: the warmongering and homophobia and earth-hatred that grips our politics. For years the progressive community has been flummoxed by the strength of the personal claim that a right-wing fundamentalist can have.

In Madison there is the very rare demonstration of a politically left spirit world, a whirlwind of vibrating smiles and flung arms and hands — and the spectacle is like a presence crashing through from Paul Robeson, from Sojourner Truth, from Emma Goldman. It is a coming back of the great marches in the 1930s around Union Square that were labeled "labor turmoil" by *The New York Times* — and now the *Times* is doing that again.

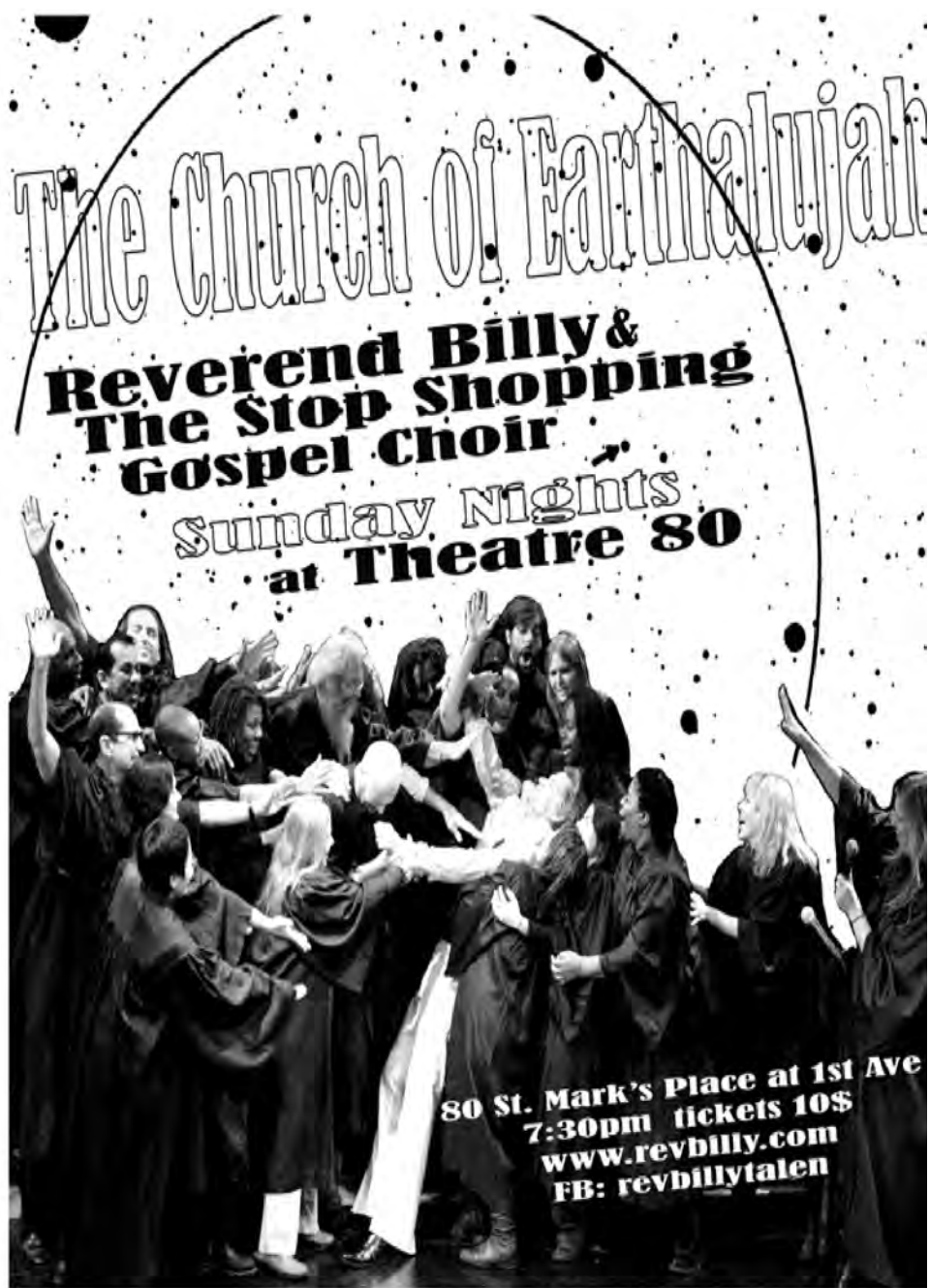


PRAISE DEMOCRACY: Rev. Billy Talen.

We departed Madison with memories of the labor and civil rights movements, but also we could feel the Battle of Seattle. The student-labor coalition, the race, gender and class diversity in the rotunda, took us back to November of 1999.

A grandmother from Eau Claire, Wis., stops Savi and Lena and me on the marble balcony and begins to confess it all, her whole life, she is wide-eyed and singing her words — and she will tell us her history up to that moment. She is a lifelong nurse who raised a family with her electrician husband Hal. Her present moment is so glorious that she is pouring her life through it. We just stand there and take it in.

People are finding their lives in Madison. Or, their lives are living things and are finding them. It's hard to figure it out but it's easy to see. A methodical thief wants to take their money from them, but the seizure by this returning presence of life, this Spirit, is overwhelming the old subject of the Tea Party governor. You start by shouting "My life matters!" and then a roaring cataract comes up through your body and the language triples in volume and the words change to "My life is here now!"



HOPE AND FEAR WITH

BY ANJALI KAMAT

BENGHAZI, Libya—It has become a platitude to say that Libya's rebellion differs significantly from the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. Indeed, it does. The regime's unwillingness to show any restraint rapidly turned the protest into an armed revolt, and as the casualties increase so too does the level of international outrage, and with it, the possibility of Western military intervention.

However, what's lost in Euro-American debates over a no-fly zone is the fact that Libya's Feb. 17 revolution began as a peaceful and leaderless popular uprising. Its primary demands were — and remain — almost identical to those of the majority of protesters in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen: freedom of expression, democracy and the ousting of a dictator and his repressive security apparatus. In a context like Gaddafi's Libya (or Mubarak's Egypt and Ben Ali's Tunisia) where even the smallest act of dissent means time in prison and torture, these fundamentally liberal demands take on a far more radical hue.

If Egyptians were stunned that 18 days of mass peaceful protests could oust Mubarak, the euphoria of shaking off Gaddafi's control came even quicker in the restive cities of Eastern Libya. After just four days of demonstrations and violent clashes, Benghazi, Al-Bayda, Derna, and Tubruk, one by one, all declared their liberation from over four decades of iron-fisted rule. As Gaddafi's forces withdrew or surrendered, unarmed protesters destroyed every symbol of the hated regime; burning down police stations, the torture chambers of the internal security

forces, and, in Benghazi, the fortress-like barracks that housed Gaddafi's brigades.

But with the lightning speed of an unimaginable victory came unprecedented responsibilities. Within days, lawyers who had been agitating for relatively minor legal reforms were suddenly thrust into the leadership of a popular rebellion that became headquartered at a courthouse in Libya's second-largest city, Benghazi. Among them are outspoken human rights advocates like Fathy Terbil and the spokesperson of the Provisional National Council, Abdel Hafiz Ghogha. Terbil represented the victims of one of the Gaddafi regime's most notorious crimes, the massacre of 1,200 inmates at the Abu Salim prison in 1996. His arrest on Feb. 15 sparked the initial protests in Benghazi.

Many of the figures on or close to the council have, at some point, publicly questioned Gaddafi's policies and the terror of his revolutionary committees — and, in some cases, paid for their dissent with long prison terms. The new leaders of Libya's rebellion do not represent any single ideological position. What they do share, and this is a failing that many of the council members in Benghazi readily acknowledge, is that few of them have any experience with politics, governance or popular mobilization.

That's not surprising given that one of the key achievements of Gaddafi's 42 years in power has been the systematic annihilation of civil society. Any effort toward community or labor organizing or building political associations was swiftly and brutally stamped out as an unacceptable form of dissent, punishable, in some cases, by death.

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Manufacturing Disaster

BY ARUN GUPTA

This century, barely out of the box, is already flush with mega-disasters: Hurricane Katrina, Haiti's earthquake, the 2004 Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami, the BP oil spill, Cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, and now Japan's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns.

Apart from industrial screw-ups like the BP oil spill and Hungary's "Red Sludge Tsunami," these events are classified as "natural disasters," which is a misleading term. The adjective natural should remind us that earthquakes, wildfires, hurricanes and tsunamis are part of a healthy planetary process. Hurricanes and fires in particular play an important role in ecological renewal. It is the collision between a natural hazard and human society and economy that creates the disaster.

Humanity, after all, owes its rise to a wandering asteroid that hammered the Earth 65 million years ago. And if it weren't for plate tectonics that subduct and lift crustal masses with the resultant volcanoes and earthquakes, there would be no earth under our feet, just a waterworld (at least sans Kevin Costner).

How a society is impacted depends on how it is organized. So the February 2010 earthquake in a prosperous Chile, which claimed less than 600 lives, was about 500 times more powerful than the 7.0 magnitude convulsion in a destitute Haiti, which killed more than 222,000 people.

Japan's quake at magnitude 9.0 was even

more powerful than Chile's, but relatively few people appear to have perished from the tremor itself because of Japan's famed emergency preparedness. It was the tsunami that killed thousands and the apocalyptic meltdowns that may claim many more lives still.

Tsunamis offer a unique view into the intersection of society and natural hazards. An Oxfam study found that in much of Indonesia, Thailand and India ravaged by the 2004 tsunami, four times as many women died as men. The timing of the tsunami, hitting on a Sunday morning, struck women hard because Indonesian women who lived near the ocean were much more likely than men to be at home caring for children or women in Indian fishing villages were waiting on beaches to haul back the day's catch. Plus, according to Oxfam, women in these societies were less likely to have the ability to escape by swimming or climbing trees, all of which contributed to the gender imbalance in deaths.

Economic factors were also at play. Untrammelled seaside development like shrimp farming and tourist resorts decimated seagrass beds, coral reefs and mangroves, all of which can greatly diminish the force of tsunamis. These projects also often impoverish, displace and concentrate local people in close quarters up to the water's edge, which increases their vulnerability. And poor countries are far less likely to have early-warning systems for tsunamis. These same factors multiply the human toll of cyclones. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, it was among those who

LIBYA'S REBELS

Notwithstanding his son Saif al-Islam's much-touted PhD dissertation at the London School of Economics on the role of civil society in democratization, Gaddafi said in a televised address last year that civil society is a bourgeois invention of the West with no place in Libya. Labor unions, he added, are for the weak.

Filling a political vacuum this expansive will not be an easy task for the newly formed council that is still grappling with the reality of a hopeful pro-democracy uprising that has morphed into a war they might very well lose. Although the East was quick to fall from Gaddafi's control, there's a pervasive fear that their gains might be easily and brutally reversed. Already eastern towns are squeezed for food and medical supplies, all of which usually originate from Tripoli. Increasingly, there are reports of infiltration by suspected pro-Gaddafi elements.

Most significant, few rebel leaders have military experience. While the rebel army has some defectors from Gaddafi's forces, it is largely composed of untrained young volunteers eager to help their compatriots in the heavily bombarded towns surrounding the capital city of Tripoli. As they were routed from the oil city of Ras Lanuf and other coastal towns stretching east to Benghazi, most remain bitterly aware that they are in for a bloody fight against a far better-equipped opponent.

Hospitals in the East are reeling from the flood of patients bearing wounds from heavy-caliber weapons. One doctor in Al-Bayda, who had been in Gaza during Israel's Operation Cast Lead, described the scale of the injuries during the first few days of the uprising as similar to what he had witnessed in Gaza. As

the casualties rise in the besieged towns of the West as well as the frontline towns in the East, some estimates place the numbers of dead in the thousands.

This is the context in which Libyans are calling for a no-fly zone. They know full well that a no-fly zone won't necessarily clinch the battle for them and could backfire. Like the courageous protesters throughout North Africa and the Middle East, they want the victory to be their own, achieved without outside help. Everywhere in the East, large banners oppose foreign military intervention. But as the death toll rises, the Libyan call for a no-fly zone is a desperate attempt to buy time.

The anti-imperialist arguments against imposing a no-fly zone are many and convincing. Given the appalling track records of those within the United States and Europe who are loudest in their calls for intervention, it might be tempting to dismiss those inside Libya who are calling for a no-fly zone as naïve, or worse, stooges of U.S. empire. But the challenge for those who oppose Western intervention is how to show meaningful solidarity with a people engaged in a nationwide struggle for liberation. In the words of one Benghazi resident I spoke to: "What's happening today here in Libya and across the Arab world is a struggle to achieve the real end of colonialism, to finally rid ourselves of authoritarian rulers who are unaccountable to their people and have been propped up by foreign powers."

Anjali Kamat is an independent radio and print journalist and a producer for Democracy Now!.



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

POWER HUNGRY: Col. Muammar Gaddafi has managed to last in power for 42 years in part by demolishing Libya's civil society.



DEVASTATED: The damage wrought by the earthquake and tsunami that pummeled Japan resulted from both natural forces and how society is organized.

lacked the money and means to flee who suffered the most deaths.

In Haiti, this system of capitalist underdevelopment, enforced over two centuries by France, the United States, the IMF and World Bank, left it economically devastated prior to the January 2010 temblor. Over decades, the migration of Haiti's rural poor into urban slums left millions living in extremely shoddy housing, which magnified the number of deaths enormously. The ef-

fects of underdevelopment, especially deforestation, intensify other natural hazards such as hurricanes, which has added to Haiti's misery and vulnerability both before and after the earthquake.

Japan's tragedy, on the other hand, stems more from the hubris of overdevelopment. Its government spent billions of dollars building seawalls that were overwhelmed by devastating waves of water. Critics warned against siting nuke plants on the coast precisely be-

cause they would be exposed to the earthquake-tsunami combination. "But the government gives [nuclear] power companies wide discretion in deciding whether a site is safe," according to *The New York Times*. In the case of the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, where at least two of three reactors in operation have melted down, diesel generators for back-up cooling were placed below a seawall and knocked out of commission by a tsunami that topped the barrier.

For Japan, nuclear power was both a solution to compensate for extremely limited hydrocarbon reserves and a big-ticket export, so it was willing to countenance an industry with an outrageous history of accidents. This includes a 1995 explosion at an experimental reactor at Monju that shut the facility for 14 years; an earthquake and subsequent fire and radioactive leak at the Kashiwazaki plant in 2007; a steam explosion that killed four workers in 2004 at a plant west of Tokyo; and the absurdly tragic case in 1999 of technicians — under pressure from a supervisor to complete their work — resorted to mixing nuclear fuels in buckets and overfilled a tank, which initiated a self-sustaining chain reaction that killed two of them.

Natural hazards, of course, will continue to occur. But with the drive for more industrialization, developing technologies with un-

known drawbacks (such as nanotechnologies), and less regulation and oversight, the future looks bleak. Indeed, natural hazards are becoming less and less natural, from the threat of newly emerging diseases inflamed by agribusiness practices to earthquakes apparently caused by hydrofracking and geothermal energy production to climatic and hydrological catastrophes intensified by global warming.

This era of mega-disasters should be making us aware of the insanity of our economy. The one silver lining to Japan's cloud of deadly radiation is that it may dispel the specious argument that nuclear power is the answer to global warming. But even if it does, we need to dispense with the logic behind this argument: that we can solve one crisis of capitalist development with another capitalist fix.

In the case of climate change, which is likely to reshape our world with unimaginably dire consequences, one "solution" gaining traction is geoengineering. Geoengineering is based on the assumption it's too difficult to shift human society toward a low-consumption, shared economy. Instead, keep on driving those SUVs to big-box retailers to fill your McMansion with more crap because we will just re-engineer the earth to adapt it to global warming and our rapacious consumer economy.

It sounds like a joke except some of the biggest billionaires in the world, such as Bill Gates, are throwing their wealth into far-fetched schemes to re-engineer the earth, the oceans and the atmosphere. And when something goes wrong, as it inevitably will, it will make plugging an undersea volcano of oil or cooling a runaway nuclear reaction seem like child's play.

PHOTO: REUTERS/KYODO

Dispatches From Egypt’s Revolution



THE REVOLUTION WILL BE EXPORTED: A woman holds up a 1950s-era Libyan flag at a solidarity demonstration in Egypt.

BY SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS

Egypt has fundamentally changed. Its people have changed. The popular uprising that swept Egypt not only toppled a dictator but is reshaping society. From Tahrir Square to Alexandria, Mahalla to Suez, Egyptians are calling for a reversal of their relationship with the state.

Egyptians have been instilled with a new sense of political agency and are embracing the revolutionary moment. But the battle to replace the underlying power structure in Egypt with a democratic system has yet to be won. And the road is long.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took the reins of power on Feb. 11 after Hosni Mubarak was booted from office. The army generals dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution — in line with protesters’ demands — and will rule by decree until a civilian government can be formed following presidential and parliamentary elections later this year.

The army quickly appointed a panel of legal scholars that has drafted interim changes to the constitution that amend provisions governing electoral laws and party rules. The panel also added an article empowering the newly elected parliament to appoint a commission to draft a new constitution. The recommendations will be put to a popular referendum, but the initial reaction has been skeptical. Many Egyptians argue the changes are limited, the process hasty and the constitution discredited.

Holding elections so rapidly begs the question of whether they will really be free given that new political parties have less than six months to form, draft platforms, organize, fundraise and campaign in a nation of 82 million. Most established opposition parties, suppressed for decades, have scrambled for political crumbs thrown down from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) over the past 30 years and have lost all popular legitimacy.

This leaves just two political forces fully ca-

pable of running in elections later this year: the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood. It’s essentially the same situation as before the uprising, albeit without Mubarak and his cronies at the helm. For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood is forming a political party but has declared it will not field a presidential candidate and is not seeking to gain a majority in parliament.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, the army would prefer to hand control over day-to-day affairs back to a civilian government and return to its position as the backbone of power behind the scenes.

The military has been the ruling institution in Egypt since 1952, when Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers staged a nationalist coup against the pro-British monarch King Farouk. In Nasser’s time, the military was a regular presence in the daily lives of Egyptians, arresting and torturing dissidents while police and state security played a minor part.

After Israel defeated Egypt in the 1967 war and Anwar Sadat rose to power, state

security forces played a much larger role in suppressing dissent while the army retreated from public view. This trend continued under Mubarak until the military eventually became a shadowy element of political life and a silent partner to the dictatorship. But while the military’s role had become less visible — press reporting on the army has been banned for more than 50 years — its power and privilege remained intact.

Senior army officers live a life apart in self-contained military cities, complete with their own housing, sports teams and supermarkets selling foreign goods at a discount. Effectively banned by the 1978 Camp David Accords from going to war again, the Egyptian military has built a sprawling business empire that includes vast real estate holdings in the north and on the Red Sea coast, and its divisions make everything from television sets and jeeps to olive oil, bottled water and fertilizer. It is estimated that the military controls from 10 to 30 percent of the Egyptian economy.

The Egyptian army receives \$1.3 billion a year in U.S. military aid and it will resist any shift in foreign policy that could threaten its relationship with Washington. Within a day of taking power, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces affirmed Egypt “is committed to all regional and international obligations and treaties.” This presumably includes abiding by the Camp David Accords, facilitating the passage of U.S. warships through the Suez Canal, maintaining the siege on Gaza and continuing to sell subsidized natural gas to Israel: none of which reflect popular opinion in Egypt.

The Supreme Council has also repeatedly warned against the wave of strikes that gripped Egypt when organized labor joined the uprising and dealt the decisive blow that toppled Mubarak’s regime. It was labor that laid the groundwork for the Jan. 25 revolt through years of strikes, sit-ins and protests. In defiance of the military, which has held back from cracking down on the labor movement, workers are continuing the strikes to call for improvements in working conditions, job security, a minimum wage, independent trade unions and the removal of “mini-Mubarak”: the corrupt management and heads of institutions found throughout the workplace and society.

Continued on page 14

Delayed Defiance

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF LIBERATION

BY HAMID DABASHI

Muammar Gaddafi’s defiant speech on Feb. 22, refusing to relinquish power even after his army massacred Libyans in their hundreds to suppress their uprising, will go down in history as the rambling soliloquy of a mad colonel who has so deeply fallen into the very depth of his own delusions that only a Gabriel García Márquez can conjure him up in a revised version of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*.

It would have been exceedingly sad were it not so murderous; the wretched tyrant stood there Lear incarnate, mumbling in fear and fury upon the heath of his own tormented mind, entirely oblivious to what had befallen his land, threatening Libya:

*I will have such revenges on you
That all the world shall — I will do such things —
What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be
The terrors of the earth!
You think I’ll weep
No, I’ll not weep:
I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
Or ere I’ll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!*

“We’re witnessing,” as the Libyan novelist Hisham Matar recently said, “the violent lashings of a dying beast.”

POST-COLONIAL DEFIANCE

The eloquent discourses of defiance against the corrupting condition of European coloniality reached their poetic crescendo last century with Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Albert Memmi, and came to a conclusion with the theoretical passion and precision of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. After the feverish gibberish of Muammar Gaddafi — the decadent and defiant relic of domestic tyranny

picking up from European colonial domination — the colonial discourse has finally degenerated into mere Tourette Syndrome.

Rambling about how he was “a fighter, a revolutionary from tents,” that he “will die as a martyr at the end,” and threatening “everything will burn,” Gaddafi stood there amid the rubble of a U.S.-bombed building like Marquez’s “Patriarch,” “the All Pure,” “the Magnificent,” “Zacarias,” like his literary prototype somewhere between 107 and 232 years old: paranoid, ruthless, superstitious, broken, fallen, pathetic. Ben Ali and Mubarak’s exits were princely in comparison.

After Gaddafi’s speech, the discourse of postcoloniality of the last 200 years has come to an end. We need a new language — the language of post-coloniality, having had a false dawn when the European colonial powers packed and left, has just started. After 42 years of charismatic banality and carnivalesque cruelty, Gaddafi is among the last vestiges of a European colonial destruction not just of world material resources but, far more crucial, of a liberated moral imagination. There are a number of these relics still around. Two of them have been deposed. But still the criminal cruelty and the identical gibberish of many more — from Morocco to Iran, from Syria to Yemen — are to be taught the dignity of a graceful exit, an ennobling silence.

As in Tunisia and Egypt, Libyans have arisen in a collective act of deferred postcolonial defiance, to demand and exact their national sovereignty, predicated on democratic institutions, rule of law and the just distribution of their national resources and the wealth they generate: all the prerequisites of a dignified life that was due to them in the gruesome aftermath of the obscene and ludicrous Italian colonialism that lasted from 1911 to 1951. But like all other Europeans, Italians packed and left Libya having not just plundered its natural resources. They also left it bereft of any enduring institution of democracy. Gaddafi was

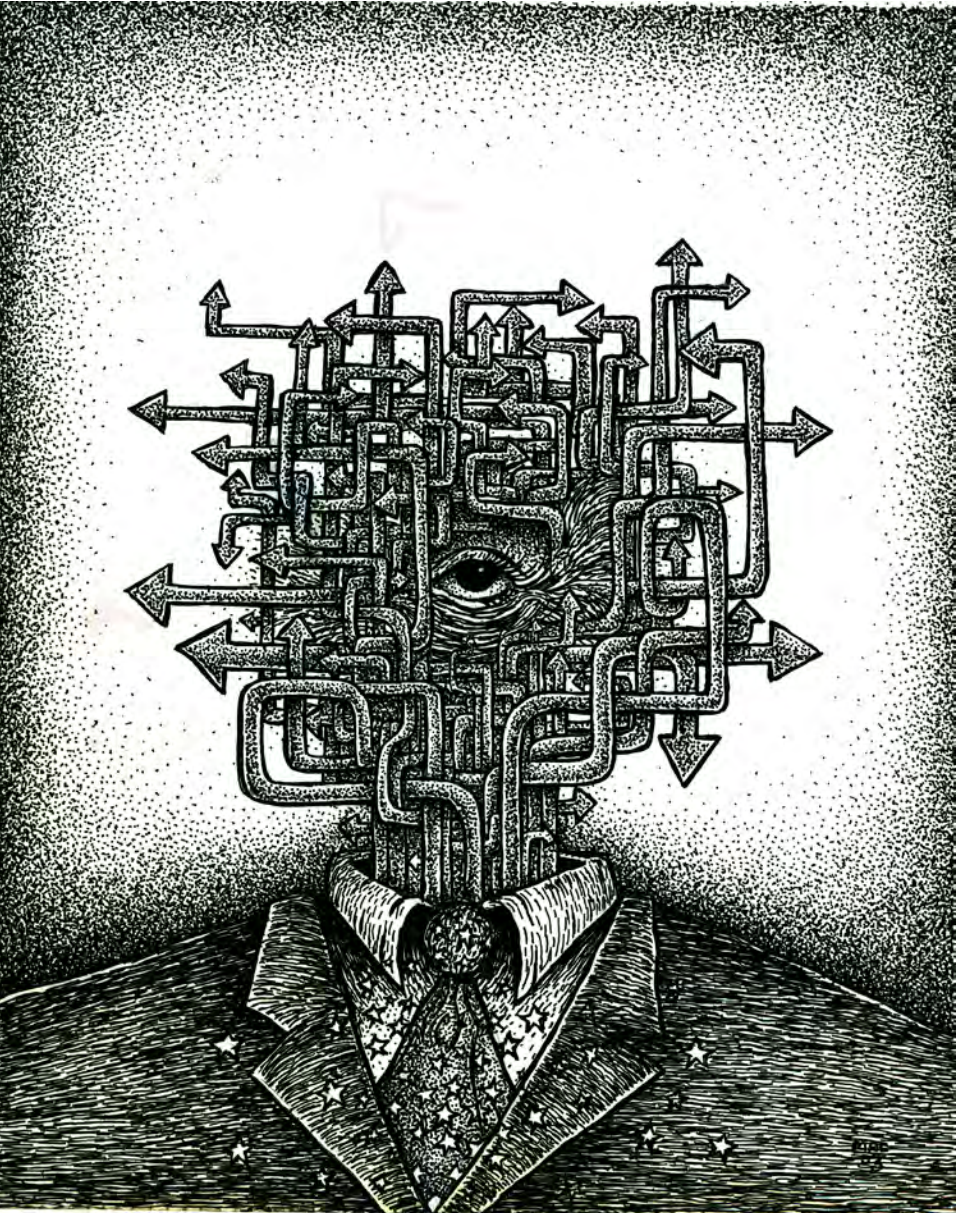


ILLUSTRATION: MAC MCGILL

the nativist aftertaste of European colonialism — the bastard son of its militarism, charlatanism, barefaced barbarity.

The last vestiges of European colonialism that robbed nations of their natural resources, enslaved them as abused labor in order to fortify the material foundations of a now globalized capitalism, fomented tribal and sectarian hostilities — Arabs and Persian, Sunnis and Shi’is, Muslims and Hindus, Muslims and Christians — left no possibility of any enduring institution of political modernity. A functioning democracy was supposed to have come about in the aftermath of European colonial barbarism. But charismatic lunacies — ranging from Gaddafi, Robert Mugabe and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad back to Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini and Idi Amin — were left behind.

AWAKENING FROM A NIGHTMARE

Today we are awakening from a nightmare. What we are witnessing around the Arab and Muslim world is the birth of the first postcolonial nations, beyond the post-independent pathologies of European colonialism, when native tyrants replaced their European counterparts and for decades abused our noble anger, banked on our fears, plundered our resources, wasted our hopes, robbed us of our democratic dignity, and delayed any meaningful formation of sovereign and liberated nation-states. So early when the dawn has broken, such long and arduous days ahead, and so full of anxious hope we are — this time for real.

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BREAKING THE SIEGE: Shifting political winds in Egypt may undermine the four-year-long blockade of Gaza. Shown here are Palestinians at the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

Cracks Appear in the Gaza Blockade

BY ALEX KANE

The popular revolution that ousted Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak has focused renewed attention on Egypt’s role in the blockade of the Gaza Strip. For nearly four years Egypt has aided Israel and the United States in strangling Gaza’s economy, but there are small signs that the siege may be easing.

“The world keeps watching as Gaza is blockaded,” said Mousheera Jammal, a Palestinian activist in Gaza who has been involved with organizing against the clampdown, but “there is hope because of the Egyptian youth.”

On March 6, a delegation organized by Tahrir 4 Gaza successfully crossed the Egyptian border into Gaza and delivered a “symbolic 50-pound bag of cement.” It was the “first bag of cement not approved by Israel”

and that hadn’t come through smuggling tunnels, according to a press release from Tahrir 4 Gaza.

Organizers had to contend, however, with a recalcitrant Egyptian military which is currently running the show in Egypt. Posts by activists on tahrir4gaza.net claimed the military pressured them to “reschedule the event,” and that authorities warned bus companies against transporting delegation members to the border.

Organizers are now planning to bring 30 tons of cement into Gaza as part of a series of trips that would “eventually culminate in the permanent opening of the border to people and goods between post-revolutionary Egypt and Palestine,” according to delegation head Ahmed Elassy.

Since 2007, both Israel and Egypt have imposed a crippling siege on the 1.3 million Pales-

tinians in Gaza to undermine the government led by Hamas, which won elections in January 2006 for the Palestinian parliament and the following year defeated a coup launched by the U.S. and Israeli-backed Fatah.

Cementing its role as junior partner in U.S. and Israeli dominance in the region, Egypt shut the Rafah crossing along Southern Gaza, closing a critical point of access for trade, goods and people.

Palestinian attorney and analyst Noura Erekat explains that Egypt’s cooperation with the blockade is largely due to pressure from the United States and Israel, as well as a view shared with Israel that the Islamist Hamas movement is a threat.

Yet the revolution in Egypt has altered this equation. Prominent Egyptian figures such as Arab League General Secretary Amr Moussa and Nobel laureate Mohamed ElBaradei

have spoken out against the blockade. The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s largest opposition group, is also against the blockade. And Egypt’s Foreign Minister Nabil al-Arabi has called for an end to the siege.

The key player is Egypt’s military, however. It has close ties to Israel, receives \$1.3 billion a year in U.S. military aid and is ruling the country by decree while elections are organized.

The Palestinian Ma’an News Agency reported March 6 “getting out of Gaza is harder than ever.” The agency stated that the “blacklist” — Palestinians who are banned from entering Egypt — “has got longer since the Egyptian revolution, quashing hopes that the new regime would lift the siege.”

According to observers, the Egyptian military’s position on the blockade, and its insistence on allowing only 300 Palestinians per

day to leave Gaza stems from various factors.

Nadia Hijab, a senior fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies, told *The Independent* that Egypt’s rulers fear any further opening of Rafah could provide impetus for Israel to throw Gaza into Egypt’s lap. Egypt occupied Gaza for nearly two decades starting in 1948. Following its sweeping victory over Arab states including Egypt in the 1967 Six Day War, Israel began the direct military occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, among other lands.

Israel has been hoping to rid itself of responsibility for Gaza for “a long time now, and I would think that the military would be very aware of that,” said Hijab. “The military will probably walk a fine line between loosening up the blockade without inheriting Gaza.”

Noura Erekat adds, “Given the consider-

ations that this new regime will have, and the threats that it will face, it can’t [decide to lift the blockade] in a vacuum.” Those threats include Israel’s powerful military as well as the possibilities of strict conditions on or cuts to U.S. military aid.

The worst-case scenario, according to Erekat, could be Israeli forces threatening to police the border themselves on the Egyptian side.

“Fundamentally, the official position is the same for now,” wrote Issandr El Amrani, an Egyptian journalist, in a March 7 blog post on arabist.net. “Egypt has a moral responsibility to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as encourage the international community to pressure Israel into lifting the siege.”



Bahrain at the Crossroads

'EVEN THE WEATHER IS A LIE:' Pro-democracy activists rally against Bahrain state television in early March. They accuse the network of broadcasting blatant falsehoods and stoking sectarian tensions.

PHOTO: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH

Editor's Note: As The Independent went to press, 1,000 troops from Saudi Arabia entered Bahrain at the request of the Bahraini king. Opposition forces that had engaged in two months of large, peaceful demonstrations termed the armed intervention a "declaration of war." While the imminent threat is of violence against unarmed protesters, an even greater danger is a regionalization of the conflict, particularly as the Saudis look to repress Shi'i demonstrating for greater freedoms and economic equality.

BY CORTNI KERR AND TOBY JONES

Before Saudian troops entered Bahrain on March 14, an uncertain calm had settled over the small island kingdom of Bahrain. The wave of peaceful pro-democracy protests Feb. 14-17 culminated in bloodshed, including the brutal murder of seven activists by the armed forces. On orders from above, the army withdrew from the roundabout on the outskirts of the capital of Manama where the protests have been centered, and since shortly after the seven deaths it has observed calls for restraint. For weeks, thousands of jubilant protesters have reoccupied the roundabout, the now infamous Pearl Circle, and have renamed it Martyrs' Circle in commemoration of the dead.

The mood in the circle has ranged from buoyant, even carnivalesque to dead serious. The thousands of encamped demonstrators are demanding fundamental changes to the kingdom's autocratic political order.

The crown prince, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, has issued a bland call for healing and national dialogue. The country's formal opposition may be tempted by the prospect of realizing some of its long-established demands for reform. But the wounds from the direct assault at dawn on Feb. 17 are deep. Several prominent banners in Martyrs' Cir-

cle display the pledge, "No dialogue with those who killed us in cold blood." Chants echo: "We will sit here until the fall of the regime!" The fault lines that have long divided rulers and subjects in Bahrain have widened due to the carnage.

Well-organized pro-democracy marches and rallies have taken place in Manama at government institutions and at the financial harbor, a symbol of both Bahrain's recent economic prosperity and government corruption. Meanwhile, on Feb. 21 and March 2 the regime summoned tens of thousands of supporters in Manama (state television wildly claimed 300,000 in a country where the native-born population is just under 1 million). The royal family chose a large Sunni mosque, al-Fatih, as the rally site. The Al Khalifa, themselves Sunni, have a history of playing sectarian politics to divide and rule the population, which is majority Shi'i. The pro-democracy protesters, for their part, have maintained from the start that their cause is national, appealing explicitly to cross-communal solidarity.

The killing is done for now, but the cold peace between the regime and the dissidents appears set to heat up with foreign troops occupying key positions in Manama. Bahrain's revolution is not over, and its outcome is far from decided.

FALSE PROMISES

Given the military intervention, the royal family seems unlikely to enact substantive political reform. Previously, on Feb. 20, the crown prince acknowledged the "clear messages from the Bahraini people ... about the need for reforms." Most Bahrainis greeted his vague words with cynicism as they recalled the false promises from before.

In 2000 and 2001 then-Emir Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah (he has since declared himself king) promised sweeping liberal re-

forms that would transform Bahrain from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. Instead, Hamad and his cronies set up a sham bicameral parliament, decreed a constitution that consolidated power in the hands of the elites and institutionalized discrimination against the Shi'i. The king appoints a consultative council that can block legislation passed by the elected lower house. Electoral districts are gerrymandered to minimize Shi'i representation.

Popular hostility to the political status quo has simmered ever since. Although the Shi'i have suffered the most from the regime's intransigence, frustrations cut across religious lines. For 10 years, an organized opposition consisting of a handful of formal political societies (actual parties are illegal) has struggled to pressure the regime to correct its course. The two most prominent societies, the Shi'i Islamist grouping al-Wifaq and the left-leaning, non-sectarian Wa'ad, led the charge, boycotting the 2002 elections and generally refusing to give the system a stamp of legitimacy. But in 2006 the opposition ended its boycott, ran for parliament and vowed to change the system from within. They agitated for structural changes, but their incorporation into the system rendered them wholly ineffective.

The opposition decision to end the boycott split its social and political base. Alternative centers of dissent emerged, notably the Haqq Movement for Liberty and Democracy. Led by charismatic figures like Hasan Mushayma, 'Isa al-Jawdar and 'Abd al-Jalil Singace, Haqq rejected elections, called for increased grassroots organizing, including civil disobedience, and reached out to Western governments. Haqq's bold program attracted supporters from al-Wifaq and Wa'ad, and it eventually boasted a significant following in both the Shi'i and Sunni communities. Equally im-

portant were efforts by a network of young, energetic and devoted human rights activists to draw attention to Shi'i grievances in particular. At the heart of this network was the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, headed by 'Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja and Nabeel Rajab.

Haqq and the human rights activists assumed a more defiant stance against the regime than the established opposition. In 2005, the organizations began to mount peaceful street demonstrations demanding the redress of grievances such as poor housing, underemployment and credible reports of torture in the kingdom's jails.

The new opposition leaders also began publicly criticizing the Al Khalifa. They paid a heavy price: arrests, imprisonment and torture. And opposition protests were met with brutality. From 2005 to 2010, security forces routinely attacked demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets. To preempt refusal of orders by the police, the regime stepped up its practice of recruiting foreigners as officers, including non-Bahraini Arabs and Pakistanis. Not coincidentally, the opposition says, the recruits tended to be Sunni. A cycle of state violence and opposition recrimination was firmly entrenched by 2010.

The state's vicious treatment of the younger activist generation garnered them considerable credibility with the population. Where al-Wifaq and Wa'ad pliantly sought influence in the corrupt halls of power, Haqq and the human rights groups were resilient in their insubordination. It became increasingly clear that the country's political future would be decided in the streets.

GATHERING STORM

While neither Haqq nor the Bahrain Center for Human Rights is entirely responsible for drumming up the massive demonstrations, many of their grassroots activists were directly involved in the Feb. 14 "day of rage" that kicked off the series of protests, through both social media like Twitter and Facebook and on-the-ground planning.

Feb. 14, 2011, was the 10th anniversary of the National Action Charter, which contained King Hamad's original blueprint for reform. Ahead of the protest, Hamad announced an unheard-of payment of 1,000 Bahraini dinars, approximately \$2,650, for every family. The handout, however, did not placate protest organizers.

Prior to Feb. 14, these young men and



BAHRAIN KING: Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

PHOTO: JULIAN CARROLL

women had laid out their demands on various social media platforms. They called for constitutional reform, as well as freedom. They demanded genuinely free and fair elections, a consultative council representative of the citizens, the release of political prisoners and an end to corruption, torture and “political naturalization,” referring to the practice of granting foreign police recruits citizenship. As one writer summed up the program, “We do not want to overthrow the regime, as many imagine, and we do not want to gain control of the government. We do not want chairs and seats here or there. We want to be a people living with dignity and rights.”

POINT OF NO RETURN

Tens of thousands of Bahrainis attended the Feb. 14 demonstrations in Manama and villages across the country. In most places, the police attempted to halt the proceedings with force, but the participants refused to disperse, initiating a violent game of cat and mouse. Police blocked access to potential assembly points, and where demonstrators still managed to gather, riot police stood at the ready with guns, batons and tear gas. Feb. 14 marked the first fatal mistake of the regime: the death of one demonstrator.

The following morning, security forces attacked the peaceful funeral procession, unloading a barrage of gunfire and tear gas upon the mourners, leading to the death of a second demonstrator. The king took the dramatic step of apologizing for his police, promising a swift internal investigation. Few Bahrainis were convinced.

The two deaths transformed loosely coordinated protests into a more centralized and powerful movement. By late afternoon, thousands of Bahrainis were pouring into Pearl Circle voicing their demands for reform and justice. Some had marched nearly two miles from their villages to the roundabout, risking harassment by the police. Despite the duress of the preceding day, a sense of joy and empowerment permeated the circle – a feeling that something had been won that could not be taken away.

At sunset on Feb. 15 the crowd registered several thousand, swelling as the evening progressed. There was no clear leadership, and al-Wifaq and Wa’ad cadre scrambled to fill the void, but they knew it was not their movement. Nonetheless, one message rang clear: nonviolence. Speakers condemned police brutality and urged their audience not to follow suit.

The next day, Feb. 16, even more protesters returned to the circle with what they thought was a green light from the government. Many participants erected tents, intending to spend the night. A half-mile away, however, hundreds of riot troops sat waiting undetected.

In the early morning of Feb. 17, witnesses report, the police moved in, backed up by the army. Descending upon the encampment from all sides, they fired into tents with shotguns loaded with birdshot. Many demonstrators had been asleep. Four demonstrators were killed and many more were wounded. The armed forces fired upon demonstrators trying to reach the roundabout again on Feb. 18, resulting in the seventh death of the uprising.

LOST LEGITIMACY

Thousands gathered earlier that day in the village of Sitra for the funerals of three killed in the attack. Whatever legitimacy the royal family had among demonstrators had largely dissipated. The regime discredited itself further by claiming that police had “exhausted all channels” of peaceable persuasion with the snoozing protesters before drawing the shotguns. The atmosphere in Sitra was a fusion of sorrow and subdued rage.

Mourners stuck to their original petitions for justice and freedom through the transformation of the political system, as well as the refutation of regime sectarianism: “No Shi’i, no Sunnis, only Bahrainis.” Yet angrier slogans also resounded. “Try the Al Khalifa as criminals,” some shouted. Zaynab, a schoolteacher from Sitra, expressed the new mood bluntly: “Today is for civilization and no longer for kings.”

The Feb. 17 massacre, videotaped and broadcast worldwide, may have been the point of no return for the Al Khalifa. The king hastened to anoint the crown prince, who has a reputation in the West as a reformer, as the convener of national dialogue and negotiations. On Feb. 19 pro-democracy supporters reclaimed Pearl Circle and quickly reestablished their destroyed camp.

BALANCE OF FORCES

In the tense quiet that followed, the ruling family energized its own social base. Many Bahrainis benefit from the status quo because they work for state institutions or belong to favored merchant families. Others simply prefer the devil they know. As in Egypt before the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, many feel that the unruly Pearl Circle demonstrators have succeeded mainly in disrupting normal life. This sentiment is tinged with class prejudice, but also with sectarianism; many government backers allege that the Shi’i majority’s complaints are unsubstantiated. State TV has amplified these claims, leading pro-democracy activists to regard government media as a tool to incite sectarian tension. Following the Feb. 17 attack on Pearl Circle, the official network reported the discovery of a weapons cache there. Pro-democracy demonstrators adamantly denied the story. The state media claim was never validated.

The forces in the middle are the established opposition groups, al-Wifaq and Wa’ad. Initially reluctant to support the demonstrations, al-Wifaq and Wa’ad joined

forces with protesters in the wake of the regime’s violence. But since the crown prince’s call for dialogue, they have declined to echo calls for the fall of the regime. Instead, they are hoping to obtain concessions from the royal family, while leaving the Al Khalifa in place. As a Wifaq MP, Mattar Mattar, told the press, “The opposition parties are discussing their set of demands, while the protesters on the streets have their own issues.” Will those in the circle who are chanting “Down, down, Al Khalifa!” accept anything less when the opposition societies sit down at the bargaining table? It is an open question to Bahrainis themselves.

EVERY REVOLUTION UNIQUE

No two revolutions are identical. While the Bahraini king may have been scared into making concessions by events in Tunisia and Egypt, the same chain of events cannot be assumed.

Most significant, the Al Khalifa’s allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council have thrown down the gauntlet by sending military forces into Bahrain. They are trying to prevent the king and his progeny from meeting the same fate as Egypt’s Mubarak. Apart from the deep aversion Gulf monarchies have to participatory politics, the Saudis have a special interest in suppressing Shi’i dissent. The oil-rich province of al-Hasa in Eastern Saudi Arabia is home to a large Shi’i minority that harbors grievances similar to those of their Bahraini co-religionists.

Then there is the United States, whose Fifth Fleet is strategically anchored in Bahrain, along with other military assets. The Fifth Fleet prowls the Persian Gulf, location of two thirds of the world’s proven oil reserves, to ensure that the precious liquid flows to global consumers. U.S. diplomats have accordingly been inclined to overlook the escalating roughness of the Al Khalifa’s response to dissent over the last five years.

“I am impressed by the commitment that the government has to the democratic path


that Bahrain is walking on,” said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Manama on Dec. 3, 2010. As that path now appears to be lit from Pearl Circle rather than the palace, the Obama administration is trapped in its own rhetoric. It is urging the Al Khalifa to pursue “meaningful reform” and rebuking the regime for its violence, but stopping well short of the condemnatory language it employed to denounce similar repression in nearby Iran.

With each wave of violence that has swept Bahrain since February, the demands of the pro-democracy demonstrators have grown louder, more insistent and more radical. King Hamad has responded with apparent concessions, issuing a royal apology for the first two fatalities, pledging a renewed push for reform, firing four Cabinet ministers and, on Feb. 22, ordering the release of several political prisoners, including 23 Shi’i activists who were on trial for sedition. The freeing of these men had been a key plank of the new opposition’s platform for some time.

One of the accused, Hasan Mushayma’ of Haqq, was being tried in absentia. He returned to Bahrain following a royal pardon. Mushayma’ could mediate between the hard-line crowds and the less confrontational established opposition, but on March 7 he announced the formation of the Coalition for a Republic, which calls for the complete removal of the regime. It consists of Haqq and two other opposition groups, Waaf’a and Bahrain Freedom Movement.

While protesters remain unyielding in their demands for an entirely new political order, the entry of foreign military forces in Bahrain poses a dangerous new challenge for them and the region as a whole.

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WHO’S WHO IN BAHRAIN

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa was an emir before making Bahrain a kingdom in 2002.

Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa is the heir apparent and eldest son of King Hamad.

Al-Wifaq, a Shi’i Islamist grouping, is one of the two significant opposition political societies.

Wa’ad is a left-leaning, non-sectarian political society that is part of the establishment opposition.

The Haqq Movement for Liberty and Democracy is led by charismatic figures like Hasan Mushayma’, who recently returned from exile. Haqq distinguishes itself from the establishment opposition by rejecting elections and engaging in street protests.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights is at the center of a movement to draw attention to Shi’i grievances around political and economic discrimination.

The Coalition for a Republic is a new political formation that is calling for the complete downfall of the regime.

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Egypt

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The military's calls for an end to the strikes have been echoed in other sectors of Egyptian society, namely the middle and upper classes, but activists are already looking to the next phase of the revolution: economic and social liberation.

Within the popular uprising, gender relations took a giant leap forward. In the streets, women risked their lives alongside men to take on the police and state security forces and later in the defense of Tahrir against Mubarak's thugs. Inside the square, women — veiled and unveiled — spoke of a new social dynamic where they felt free of discrimination, sexual harassment and the constraints of patriarchy. The struggle remains to carry those ideals from the revolutionary republic that blossomed inside Tahrir during the 18-day uprising to the whole of Egyptian society.

Also during the uprising, religious tensions between Egypt's Muslims and its Coptic Christian minority ebbed dramatically. Chants of "Muslim, Christian, we are all Egyptian," were common in Tahrir along with numerous acts of solidarity. Evidence uncovered from State Security archives suggests that the violent sectarian unrest that gripped Egypt in recent years was stoked by the regime as a divide-and-conquer tactic and to reinforce the idea that, without Mubarak, the country would be overwhelmed by radical Islamist groups. New documents prove the interior ministry helped orchestrate the Alexandria church bombing on New Year's Eve that killed 21 people and wounded dozens more in the worst violence against Copts in more than a decade. And there is growing suspicion that the latest round of sec-

tarian violence — the burning of a Church in Helwan and ensuing clashes between Muslims and Christians that left 13 people dead — was the work of counter-revolutionary forces from the Mubarak era taking advantage of the security vacuum.

Meanwhile, the military's response to protesters in Tahrir and elsewhere is growing increasingly harsh. The army has used brute force, including beatings and shocks with electric batons, to break up peaceful street demonstrations. Hundreds of people have been arrested, even after the 18-day uprising, and there is mounting evidence that many were subjected to torture. Military courts have convicted and imprisoned dozens of civilians since the Supreme Council took power. In the absence of state and central security forces to suppress dissent, the military is filling the void.

The revolution nevertheless continues to chisel away at a power structure that it is trying to reshape. The ruling generals left largely intact the cabinet Mubarak appointed in the dying days of his reign. At its head was Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik, the former commander of the Egyptian Air Force, who had once described Mubarak as his "spiritual father." The army indicated Shafik would preside during the interim six-month period. But less than three weeks later, Shafik was forced to resign in the face of intense pressure from the pro-democracy movement that culminated in sustained mass street protests. The army appointed Essam Sharaf to replace him, an ex-transport minister who had taken part in the 18-day uprising. Sharaf delivered his acceptance speech directly to the protesters in Tahrir square.

While a number of revolutionary demands have been fulfilled, two key ones — the repeal of the Emergency Laws that

have been in place since 1981 and the release of all political prisoners — have yet to be accomplished.

For decades, state security forces acted as a giant lawless militia, spying on, kidnapping, threatening, humiliating and torturing Egyptian citizens. The State Security branch employed hundreds of thousands of people and maintained a vast network of informants, all for the simple purpose of keeping the regime in power.

One of the main demands by the protesters was the abolition of State Security. When its calls went unheeded, revolutionaries took matters into their own hands. Hundreds marched to the headquarters of State Security in Nasr City and to branch offices in Alexandria, Aswan, Siwa and elsewhere. After a standoff with remnants of the security forces, they stormed the complexes. They roamed the hallways and interrogation rooms looking for political prisoners. Some former detainees sobbed as they saw their old cells. They found rooms full of shredded paper but also many files that had not yet been destroyed. Activists handed over the saved documents to the army but not without making copies first, which they scanned and posted online, sharing evidence of phone tapping, election rigging and torture by the regime.

It was a watershed: citizens dismantling the very government body that had been tasked with repressing them for so long. It was a revolutionary moment. Many more like it are still needed.

Sharif Abdel Kouddous is a senior producer for Democracy Now!. He recently returned from Egypt where he covered the revolution from Tahrir Square. He can be reached at sharif@democracynow.org.

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Delayed Defiance

Continued from page 11

To save his throne, Gaddafi's corrupt army (minus the courageous who have deserted and joined their people) has carpet-bombed Libyans with Russian, Italian, French, American and British military machinery. For decades, as AlJazeera's Marwan Bishara has noted, "he's used political blackmail and financial bribes and unveiled threats of force to stay at the helm of the regime. In the process, much of the country's wealth was wasted. And so was any chance of development as his dictatorship suppressed pluralism, creativity and freedom of expression."

When Italians left Libya in 1951, some historians believe almost 50 percent of its population was killed in the course of anti-colonial struggles. Today scarcely any Libyan remembers a life without Gaddafi—thus rendering ever more powerful their dreams of liberation.

All the differences notwithstanding, the uprisings in the Arab and Muslim world and beyond are connected by the common denominator of a shared and sustained struggle. What is happening in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain or Yemen could not possibly be separated from what has happened in the Arab and Muslim world over the last half century. From the armed robbery of Palestine to the betrayed dreams and aspirations of the Iranian revolution of 1979 to the military invasion and colonial occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, all these events are integral to the democratic aspirations that have now swept across our homelands. We as a people are defying the politics of despair that colonial and imperial domination has imposed on us.

A NEW GEOGRAPHY

We are witnessing not just the end of the delusion of "the end of history" and "the clash of civilization" that the strategists of U.S. imperialism were dreaming, but the moral contours of a new imaginative geography of liberation, mapped far from the false and falsifying binary of "Islam and the West," or "the West and the Rest."

The United States and Israel may think by having the compromised upper echelons of the Egyptian army in charge of the democratic transition in Egypt they will have everything under their control. They will not. They may think "the Turkish model" would be an ideal blueprint for them to hope and expect. But these uprisings we are witnessing will not subside.

They are positing an open-ended hermeneutics of political possibilities that will remap the world — far even beyond the obscenity of Hugo Chavez ignoring the brutalities of the Islamic Republic and being a frequent flier to Tehran, or even the more absurd banality of the Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, who called Gaddafi to express solidarity. That kind of corrupt "anti-imperialism" has now lost to the rising democratic will of nations that will demand and exact their rights from domestic tyranny and imperial hubris alike.

We are witnessing a new planetary awakening far beyond Arab or any other ethnic nationalism. The world is giving birth to a new geography of itself. We must allow for and prepare for a different mode of postcolonial thinking (not yet dreamt by Bengali intellectuals) that will allow the synergies among these revolutionary uprisings to work themselves out and stop assimilating them backward into arrested jingoism of one sort or another.

The imaginative geography of this up-

rising maps out a whole new topography of world for us to navigate and discover. Though every Arab from Morocco to Yemen has every reason to be proud of what the world is witnessing in awe and admiration, neither pan-Arabism nor any other colonially racialized category is a sufficient hermeneutic parallax within which to understand, interpret and advance what is today happening in our liberated world.

The liberating geography of this uprising goes far beyond the Arab and even Muslim world. From Senegal to Djibouti similar uprisings are brewing. The commencement of the Green Movement in Iran almost two years before the uprising in the Arab world has had far reaching implications deep into Afghanistan and Central Asia, and as far as China there are official fears of a "Jasmine Revolution."

Giving birth to ourselves beyond our colonial condition, we are the fortunate witness of the dawn of a whole new discovery of who and what we are — from Morocco to Afghanistan, from Turkey to Yemen, from Central Asia to the extended domains of the Indian ocean. We must simply wake up, catch our breath and wash our eyes. We are the discoverers of a brand new world — a world whose geography is ours to map, over against the colonial map we have inherited and are now finally leaving behind. Our deferred defiance against domestic tyranny and globalized imperialism at one and the same time is the dawn of a whole new horizon on world history.

Hamid Dabashi is Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and the author of *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror*. Reprinted from english.aljazeera.net.



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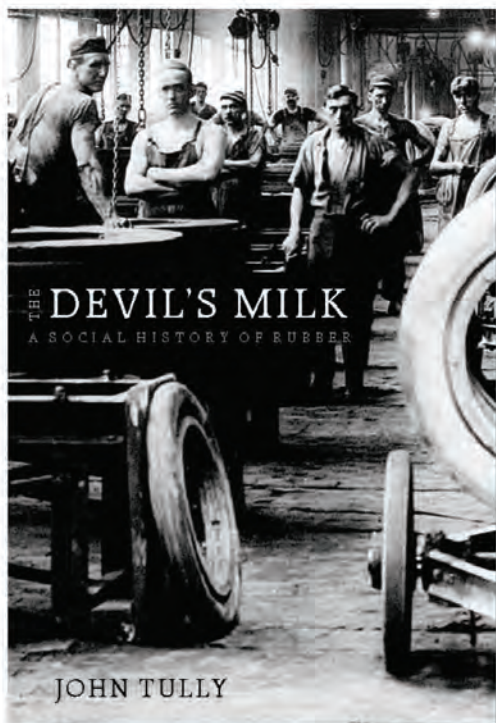
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Drawing the New Color Line

Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire

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METROPOLITAN BOOKS, 2010

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

MICHELLE ALEXANDER
THE NEW PRESS, 2010

The problem of the color line has become reinforced by prison bars. Since 1970, incarceration rates have quadrupled in the United States, leaving over two million people behind bars. Black men suffer the worst of it: As of 2009, nearly one in twenty black men were incarcerated. Black males are six times more likely to be imprisoned than white males, and more than two and a half times more likely to be incarcerated than Hispanic males, according to the Department of Justice.

The rhetoric of a "war on crime" was part of the backlash to the civil rights movement, with politicians conjuring the specter of black lawlessness to gin up white votes. Barry Goldwater brought this ostensibly race-neutral "law and order" rhetoric to the national stage, but Richard Nixon put it into practice. Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, wrote in his diary that Nixon told him, "The whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to." Pretty soon Democratic politicians were panting to prove that they too were tough on crime. Bill Clinton even left the campaign trail in 1992 to personally oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally retarded inmate who saved some pecan pie from his final meal to eat later.

Michelle Alexander sees this move towards "lockdown America" as not merely racially biased, but as part of a new system of racial control. In *The New Jim Crow*, she posits that mass incarceration has replaced Jim Crow as a racial caste system in much the same way that Jim Crow replaced slavery. While each successive incarnation grows less universal in its reach and less brutal in its application, it remains a system of institutionalized oppression.

Alexander effectively makes her case, compiling damning statistics while disarming skeptics by confessing that she herself did not initially believe that mass incarceration constituted a new form of racial domination. Step by step, she illustrates the racial inequities displayed in all aspects of the criminal justice system, from police practices and penal law statutes to Supreme Court decisions. While the law in its "majestic equality" forbids both black and white from using or selling drugs, three quarters of those imprisoned for drug offenses are black or Latino, despite the consistent finding of government surveys that whites use and sell drugs at comparable or higher rates than those of any other race. Alexander's analysis would benefit from addressing issues of class in addition to race, but she nonetheless offers an effective brief on the need for radical reform of the criminal justice system.

In *Texas Tough*, Robert Perkinson offers a well-researched and compellingly-written genealogy of the contemporary model of retributive justice, tracing it back to its blood-soaked Texas roots. Perkinson argues that historians have been mistaken in looking to Northern penitentiaries, which aimed to rehabilitate and re-integrate prisoners, to understand present-day prison practices. Instead, he claims that the current model of punishment and warehousing of prisoners



ILLUSTRATION: JESSICA PATRICK

grew to maturity in Texas.

Perkinson sketches the history of Texas prisons from their expansion following the abolition of slavery to the present day. Initially, they served as much as a source of coerced labor as a form of social control. Some reforms were instituted following the finding by a federal judge in *Ruiz v. Estelle* (1980) that the entire Texas prison system constituted a form of "cruel and unusual punishment." The rape of prisoners is no longer institutionally condoned and the Texas Prison Rodeo — billed as the "world's toughest rodeo" — has been shut down. However, convicts assigned to work duty still pick cotton in the blistering sun under the watchful eyes and guns of mostly white guards. Don't mess with Texas, indeed.

Mass incarceration is one of the major civil rights issues of our time, and its impact extends beyond prison walls. Those convicted of a crime are faced with a barrage of challenges, ranging from being ineligible for jobs and barred from social services and public housing to not being allowed to vote. The millions stripped of their rights constitute a massive underclass, separated from the rest of the country, but not even nominally equal.

While Perkinson's focus is on the historical roots of mass incarceration, Alexander's interest is in understanding its contemporary effects. Nonetheless, both bring out the horrors of mass imprisonment and the need for systemic change. As Perkinson states, "Were the prison, with its lengthy record, judged by the same standard as its inhabitants, it would surely be classified as a repeat offender, perhaps a candidate for the death penalty."

Forty years ago it was not uncommon for policymakers and academics to endorse the abolition of prisons, at least for all but the most hardened criminals. Abolishing prisons, or even significantly reducing incarceration rates, is a fringe position today. The discourse of a war on crime is too entrenched and the constituencies backing prison expansion too powerful for politicians to advocate more than a slight rollback of imprisonment.

The civil rights movement has been called a "second Reconstruction." Discussing the failure of the first Reconstruction, W.E.B. Du Bois remarked: "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery." It is past time for the millions locked up behind prison walls to see the sun again.

—MATT WASSERMAN

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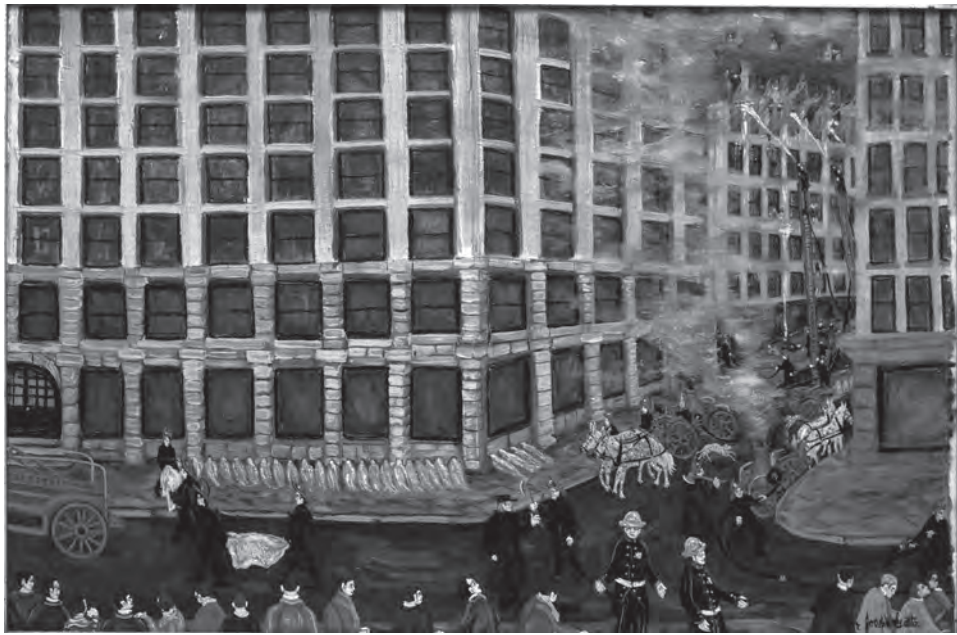
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Tragedy, Memory and Workers' Rights



Victor Joseph Gatto, Triangle Fire, March 25, 1911, c. 1944

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: One Hundred Years After
 NYU OPEN HOUSE
 528 LA GUARDIA PLACE
 THROUGH MAY 19

Art/Memory/Place: Commemorating the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire
 GREY ART GALLERY, NYU
 100 WASHINGTON SQUARE EAST
 THROUGH MARCH 26; APRIL 12-JULY 9

It's a tombstone, but an especially lovely one: Evelyn Beatrice Longman's marbled pink monolith, *The Triangle Fire Memorial to the Unknowns*, features a robed, neoclassical figure etched in eternal grief. Located in Brooklyn's Cemetery of the Evergreens, it is a monument for the seven workers who perished in the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire of March 25, 1911, and could not be identified. The factory was located on the upper floors of a "fireproof" building in lower Manhattan. There, hundreds of garment workers, most of them young, female Jewish and Italian immigrants, made women's blouses under brutal working conditions. With a cramped work floor, an abundance of oily, flammable rags and locked factory doors (a common feature of sweatshops), a small grease fire killed 146 workers, and injured 71 more, in less than half an hour.

Self-taught painter Victor Joseph Gatto witnessed the tragedy in his youth, and his *Triangle Fire, March 25, 1911* (1944) shows a view from the street: a shock of flame interrupting a march of blank buildings; confused onlookers, firemen and horses; and rendered as fey wisps, a growing file of shrouded, anonymous bodies neatly placed on the sidewalk.

While a memorial was erected in Queens' Mount Zion Cemetery in 1911, and Longman's tombstone-remembrance was finished in 1912, a stone monument is never really enough. Speaking at the second anniversary of the fire, International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) leader and former Triangle employee Pauline M. Newman put it like so: "The way to honor the memory of the dead is to build up a strong and powerful organization that will prevent such disasters as that of two years ago and serve as a monument to the dead. Lest we forget!"

Located only a few feet from the old factory (which is now New York University's Brown Building), two exhibits at NYU seek to chronicle the ongoing activism that has

been the true legacy of the fire. At NYU's Open House, the Tamiment Library has curated "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: One Hundred Years After." As an exhibition, it's a bit dispiriting: composed almost entirely of digital printouts, it feels more like a slide show or a website, not something that needs to be hanging on a wall. That aside, it's an estimable collection of images and information.

Meanwhile, NYU graduate students in Public History and Museum Studies, in collaboration with Professors Lucy Oakley and Marci Reaven, have co-curated "Art/Memory/Place: Commemorating the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire" with the Grey Gallery. Here, the story is told through a combination of old photos, artwork (including Gatto's painting and small sculptures by Longman), news articles and protest ephemera. The fire was politicized from the start: The city's insistence on a private burial for the workers led unions to organize a memorial parade for the same day, which drew, according to the Open House exhibit, around 370,000 mourners.

Both exhibits include wonderful, biting editorial cartoons published in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, squarely placing the blame on the greed and callousness of the factory owners. The Grey Gallery also includes *The Overcrowded Raft*, a bracingly stressful/storm-y 1913 illustration by Joseph Keppler, Jr., in which a huddled mass of working women have been set adrift in a "sea of want," barely afloat on their meager wages, tormented by sharks named "disease" and "prostitution."

The Triangle fire was a pivotal moment in U.S. labor history. So many things — from the galvanization of unions and the criminalization of sweatshops to New York building codes and New Deal labor laws — can be traced back to those 146 workers. Today, in lower Manhattan, the Brown Building is filled with computers instead of sewing machines, and former tenement slums rent for \$2,000 a month. But at the Grey Gallery exhibit, there's a 1994 ILGWU anti-sweatshop flier: through the photocopied haze, we see a harsh factory hallway, a uniformed official, a row of shrouded bodies. The photo is of a Thai toy factory where, in 1993, 188 workers, mainly young and female, were killed in a fire. They were unable to escape because the factory doors were locked. Perhaps they deserve a monument, too.

—MIKE NEWTON



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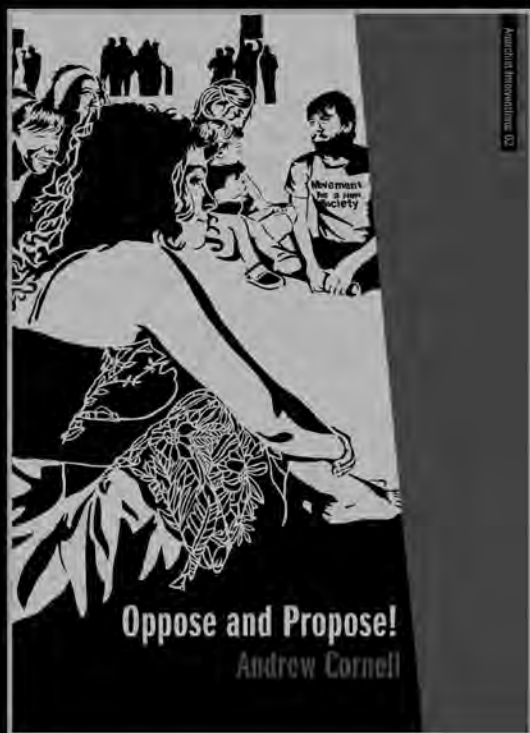
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By IRINA IVANOVA

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Did you know Andy Warhol's ancestral home is in Miková, Slovakia? I didn't, either. But the curators at the Ukrainian Museum do, and it's one of the sponsors of **KINOFEST NYC**, a film festival that will take place March 16-20 at several locations in the East Village.

While Warhol will be the focus of the festival's opening night — which will include the photo exhibit "Slavs of New York: Andy Warhol's Nowhere," along with the film *I Am From Nowhere*, which explores Warhol's Slovakian roots — the rest of Kinofest NYC celebrates independent cinema from Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries. (Full disclosure: being an immigrant

from Ukraine, I have a 100 percent vested interest in this topic).

Festival director and founder Andrew Kotliar, who started a similar film series in Philadelphia prior to Kinofest NYC, describes Ukraine as a country "still figuring themselves out."

While the festival, which is in its second year, has received a lot of support from the Ukrainian community in New York — this year's sponsors include Veselka and Self Reliance (NY) Federal Credit Union, which serves the Ukrainian community — Kotliar emphasizes that it's not just a Ukrainian event. Featured films include *Torn From the Flag*, a historical documentary about the 1956 revolution in Budapest, and *Women From Georgia*, a documentary that explores the lives of women who have left Georgia for the United States to work as home attendants and nannies and send money back home to their families.

For a somewhat different night at the museum, **TRADE SCHOOL**, the barter-based teaching facility I've been following so earnestly, will be camping out at the Whitney Museum of American Art for one night on March 25. The event, called **Coincidence of Wants**, will feature 16 simultaneous classes. To gain entry, just bring a handmade offering of your choice (which will be prominently displayed). Sign up at tradeschool.ourgoods.org/whitney.

If you're interested in a more traditional learning format, be sure to check out Shehzad Nadeem's discussion of his new book *Dead*

Ringers: How Outsourcing is Changing the Way Indians Understand Themselves at **POWERHOUSE BOOKS ARENA** on March 30.

In *Dead Ringers* Nadeem, a sociology professor at Lehman College, examines the lives of Indians who work in call centers and are paid to emulate Americans through their accents, Westernized names and habits.

Though technologically savvy, more often than not they're relegated to carrying out rote tasks under the eyes of overbearing management in the dead of night — when most of their clients, on the other side of the world, are awake. Sound familiar? "The future is calling" just got a whole new meaning.

Indy Picks is a regular column featuring free and low-cost events around the city. Send event suggestions to irina@indypendent.org.



Ten-year-old Quinn Accardi will be teaching a class on cartooning at Trade School's Coincidence of Wants event at the Whitney Museum.

CREDIT: TRADESCHOOL.OURGOODS.ORG

Fashion Statement

Bill Cunningham New York (2010)
DIRECTED BY RICHARD PRESS
RELEASED BY ZEITGEIST FILMS
OPENING AT FILM FORUM
MARCH 16

No one upholds the street cred of style with as much manic fervor as Bill Cunningham, the irrepressible octogenarian *New York Times* fashion photographer. A decade in the making, Richard Press' *Bill Cunningham New York* shows its fiercely private subject to be the ultimate anti-scenester. Wiry and jovial, with on occasion awkwardly flailing arms and a slight idiot savant affectation, Cunningham resembles a silver-haired Hulot rather than an arbiter of taste, as he rides his trademark bike — his

29th; the previous 28 were stolen — around town on a never-ending quest for beauty.

In an era, according to Cunningham, of "cookie-cutter sameness," he not only captures touches of attire or whole outfits that bespeak the wearers' distinctly individual taste, but he also often distills from their combined impact the penchant for a particular fresh look or new trend. If, as Roland Barthes suggests, turning photography into an art serves "to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness" that animates it, Cunningham's artistry defies such pretensions and taps into the élan vital to fashion through an uncanny, visionary knack for collage. The flair of cubist analysis in the layout of his weekly columns — the populist mosaic "On the Street" and its society counterpart "Evening Hours" — makes for a signature as unmistakable as one of Banksy's rats.

Like the imprint of his fellow anonymity-seeking street artist, Cunningham's roaming camera eye appears ubiquitous, yet operates with the utmost discretion, which, instead of a strategy, seems to be a matter

of old-fashioned propriety. We find out hardly anything about his Irish-Catholic New England family and the sense of decorum they might have instilled in him, but Cunningham has an oddball patrician air about him. When he is snapping the wealthy at their gilded gatherings, including his friend Brooke Astor's 100th-birthday bash, it is not hard to imagine him as a prodigal cousin who has opted out of privilege and chosen the simple life.

From his diet of cheap sandwiches and coffee and his taped-up battered poncho to his lack of any wardrobe to speak of, Cunningham fastidiously refuses to allow himself any luxury, because doing so would make him corruptible. "Money is the cheapest thing," he asserts, and resisting its pull means that nobody owns you. He doesn't have the slightest interest in celebrity and pomp; he just loves clothes — on other people — and he has accumulated an extraordinary, almost intuitive historical knowledge of their design.

Cunningham declares that fashion is our armor, but for him it is the passion that he lives and breathes. In the rare unguarded moments of *Bill Cunningham New York* Press shows the mysterious loneliness of this modest, generous man. Even Cunningham's closest collaborators and fondest admirers don't know anything about his personal life. Maybe in one of the filing cabinets he moved out of his hazardously crammed Carnegie Hall Tower apartment early last year, a Rosebud photograph awaits discovery. But that would be a different movie.

—KENNETH CRAB



Bill Cunningham photographing in the street, in *Bill Cunningham New York*.

CREDIT: ZEITGEIST FILMS

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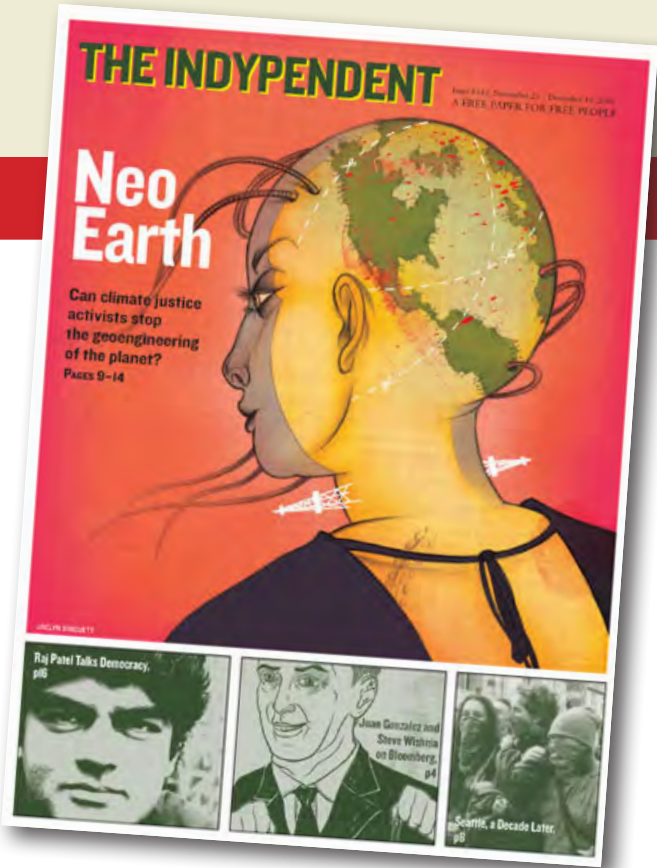
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